The Synthesis of Henri Bergson and the Vedic Tradition: The Methodology of Knowing Reality

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Abstract

The human being is the most perfect instrument for the expression of consciousness because it is capable of self-realization and of recognizing the Truth even beyond the phenomena that can be grasped by the senses. Drawing on Bergson's views and the legacy of Vedic philosophy, we discover a comprehensive system of thought—a practical and experiential knowledge that embraces the totality of life. Through this, we can understand ourselves more deeply and systematically transform ourselves to come closer to our real selves. Bergson and the ancient tradition, including the *Vedas*, *Vedanta* or *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, and the works of Swami Rama and Sri Aurobindo, provide the path and tools that lead to the truth, offer insights, and inspire confidence in a direct encounter with reality. They do so in complementary and reinforcing ways to facilitate an integrated experience.

Ordinary perception, reason, and logic are insufficient tools to know the world in its depth, its source, and the real relationship between the two. Through memory, imagination, and intuition, we can understand and assimilate the laws of nature and harness these seemingly mystical forces for inner development. Since consciousness, like life itself, is indivisible and unified, the divisive, quantitatively oriented method of reason is inadequate for exploring them. The reality revealed by intuition is challenging to trace mentally, but the love of reality, the will to understand and experience it, allows us to connect with a perception beyond the mind. The truth-value and harmony of this consistently touches and affects us, as it is the truth of the central consciousness that permeates matter. Through intuition, we can objectively orient ourselves to reality and tap into the inner essence of life.

This work covers the following main topics: the world as the manifestation of consciousness, the life impulse or driving force behind the evolution of the world, time, the human being, intuition as the instrument of freedom, and how we can experience reality.

Contents

Introduction

1. The Importance of Consciousness 5

Consciousness and its source – The narrowing of extended consciousness – The experience of the essence of life and the freedom of an extended mentality – The nature of reality or the absolute

2. Intuition as a Method 12

Intellect and intuition – The essence and nature of intuition, its value and application

3. The Work of Bergson 14

The philosopher of life theory – Beyond reason – A glimpse into reality

4. Overview of the Vedic Tradition and the Science of Yoga 19

The ages of spirituality and the soul's journey on the path of truth – The teachings of the mystics – The supramental reality of existence and the possibility of inner development

I. The World as the Manifestation of Consciousness

1. Matter and its Origin 25

The relationship between matter, life and extended mentality – Automatism, instinct, intuition, freedom – Manifestation of creation, descent and ascent – Reconciliation of the science of matter and the metaphysics of the soul

2. The Relationship of Physical Existence with Other Planes 35

One-pointed consciousness and freedom – The system of planes of consciousness – The functioning of the physical body, the life-force and the pure mind

3. The Working of Nature 43

The meaning of evolution and the ultimate purpose of existence – The basis of material existence – Fulfilment

II. Life Impulse, the Driving Force Behind the Evolution of the World

1. How Creative Force Works 49

The expression of consciousness – The universal energy or creative force – The creation of the self by the self – The vital force as the sustainer of life – The vital force in the human being: vital and nervous functions – The importance of the centres of consciousness

2. The Significance of Joy and Love 67

What is joy a sign of? – The nature of happiness – Joy and love as the nature of reality and its manifestation in the various planes of existence

III. Time

1. Duration and Static Time 76

Absolute and relative time – The nature and meaning of time and space – The present encompasses the whole of the past

2. Time Consciousness of the Supramental 86

The way out of the mind's limited world – Pure perception as the power of extended mentality – The functioning of free mentality

IV. Human Being

1. The Self-Transcending Being 93

Consciousness/mentality becomes free in the human being – Planes of existence, or surface and deep self – The aim of material life is survival – Mental life dreams of perfection – Spiritual life is a reflection of the absolute

2. Fulfilling the Purpose of Life 103

The manifestation of the absolute in the world – The essence, necessity, logic and purpose of rebirth

V. Intuition, the Instrument of Freedom

1. Transcending Everyday Consciousness 119

The limits of experience in the mind and its extension by intuition – The limiting power of reason, perception, thought and language – The stages of higher consciousness

2. The Depths of Intuition 134

The nature, value and application of intuition – The psychology of self-perfection

3. Creative and Subjective Evolution 142

Contemplation and free action – Perception of states of consciousness: waking state, dream and dreamless deep sleep – The highest state of consciousness beyond these three

VI. Experiencing the Ultimate Reality

1. Source of Consciousness 151

The various manifestations of consciousness – Reconciliation of real self and matter and its shortcomings in materialism and religion – Omnipresent reality

2. To Know the Unknown 160

Unknown or unknowable: the limits of the mind – Tracing the manifested and knowable back to its source – The sole existent

Glossary 166

Bibliography 175

References 181

Introduction

The Importance of Consciousness

Consciousness and its source – The narrowing of extended consciousness – The experience of the essence of life and the freedom of an extended mentality – The nature of reality or the absolute

The aim of this work is not merely to explore philosophical parallels, but to give a perspective and to convey a comprehensive system of thought, based on Bergson's views and the Vedic philosophical tradition, that embraces the entirety of our lives. Therefore, its value is not in knowledge for its own sake but in the practicability of the themes, perspectives, and methods presented; in the knowledge that can be put into practice and experienced. This understanding allows us to delve deeper into self-knowledge, systematically transform ourselves, and move closer to completeness. Bergson illuminates the path, provides the means, and also helps to discard methods that do not lead to the truth. He does not define the goal but simply seeks for the truth. He does not give a system to follow, a pattern of thought, or definitions, but the possibility of knowing, inspiration and confidence that there is a direct encounter with reality. A definition, concept, or doctrine is as helpful as it is limiting; thus, let us not cling to our achievements along the way but instead utilize them and continue exploring.

It may be worth starting with the distinction between consciousness and its source, which is the real or higher self. The real self is the original being, the source of all things, and has two states: unmanifest and manifest. In the former, the real self exists autonomously, with all its powers and faculties resting within itself. In the latter, the real self manifests itself along its own intention. This manifestation is best understood as a transformation, as it does not create something external but transforms itself into all that exists. This process takes place through the forces of the real self. Consciousness is the force of the self, it is the real self in motion, the energy of the conscious self that becomes visible, or in other words, manifests. Within this context, both the perceiver and the perceived (or manifested) are present; that is, the real self and the thing it perceives through its own consciousness as itself. This force of consciousness, termed the "life impulse" (*élan vital*) by Bergson, is described as a continuous, undivided, flowing stream that, following its original impulse, flows out and creates ceaselessly. Reason and matter are manifestations of this inherent force of consciousness. This inherent conscious being is what the religions call God (the masculine principle, the principle of the real self), and the consciousness-force is the life impulse, or, to use the previous example, the Goddess, the Divine Mother, the Holy Mother, the *Shakti* in the Vedic tradition

(the feminine principle, the energy of the real self). Our intellect compels us to give these two entities separate “names” for ease of understanding, yet it is crucial to acknowledge that the real self never exists without its energy, nor does energy exist without its source, the real self.

According to the Vedic tradition, this is the explanation why the primordial self and its energy that are omnipresent in various forms.[N1] In the initial phase of manifestation, the real self perceives everything manifested as itself. This universal experience can be described as "I am That", meaning that at this stage both the subject (I) and the object (That) of the experience is the real self. However, human consciousness perceives itself as a distinct and separate entity. The principles of limited, individualized experience emerge by the initial manifestation of a limiting principle or force that narrows down the universal experience. This principle separates the subject (I) from the object (That), setting them apart. Henceforth, "That" denotes only a particular thing, separate from everything else.

This gives rise to five factors that limit universal consciousness:

- Portion (*kala/kalā*) – limits the all-encompassing power.
- Knowledge (*vidya*) – narrows down omniscience.
- Attachment (*raga*) – limits completeness and indivisibility, thus creating a desire for certain things.
- Time (*kala/kāla*) – compresses eternity in time (what Bergson refers to as duration), thus creating the concepts of past, present, and future.
- Necessity (*niyati*) – limits freedom and all-pervasiveness, and narrows it in terms of cause, space and form.

Then manifest the parts of the personality (mind, intellect, ego/self-concept, subconscious), the elements, the senses and the sensory objects. This is the process by which the experience of separate selfhood/I-ness or separate existence in a particular embodiment and space-time is created. The human consciousness reflects this, as it ranges in time from the birth to the passing of this body, its

[N1] The presentation of the Vedic tradition, yoga philosophy, and yoga psychology is primarily based on the following works:

Works of Attila Bakos, published by Danvantara Publishing and Brahmana Mission, focusing on Vedic teachings, methods, and ancient scriptures. This includes extensive discussions on the *Bhagavad Gita, Vedanta Sutra, Puranas,* and *Upanishads* (refer to the bibliography for a detailed list of books).
Works of Swami Rama, with particular emphasis on *Yoga and Psychotherapy, Meditation, Samadhi,* and *Path of Fire and Light*.
Works of Sri Aurobindo, especially *The Synthesis of Yoga, The Secret of the Veda,* and *Integral Yoga*.

These foundational texts have been instrumental in shaping the content and understanding of the Vedic tradition, yoga philosophy, and psychology as presented in this work. The authors' diverse perspectives and interpretations provide a comprehensive and nuanced view of these complex and rich traditions.
Consult the *Glossary* for more detailed explanations of specialized or unfamiliar terms used in the text.

knowledge encompasses what it experiences in the outer life, it constantly searches for completeness in external things, and its freedom and power are extremely limited.

The energy of the real self, or life energy, is a flowing movement, a constant change. We can observe this in the world as well as in ourselves. The human mind is characterized by thought, desire, and feeling. We typically define or identify ourselves through these thoughts, desires, and feelings. However, by observing ourselves, we can see that they are constantly changing, coming and going. Following Bergson's method, instead of thoughts and feelings, let us focus our attention on the movement itself, on the constant change. We will notice how one thought or feeling transforms into another. Through this, on the one hand, we are able to step out of the determinism of thoughts and feelings, out of our self-identification with them, and on the other hand, we are able to grasp something more essential. Practicing this brings us progressively closer to directly experiencing the life impulse and dynamic time (duration/*durée*). The life impulse, or flowing consciousness, manifests as an undivided stream, epitomizing unity in diversity.[1] In the Eastern tradition, Patanjali writes that "it is through meditation on successive moments that discriminating knowledge is born". This wisdom extends to the inner nature of things, as well as to their outer characteristics and position.[2]

kṣaṇa-tat-kramayoḥ saṁyamād vivekajaṁ jñānam |
jāti-lakṣaṇa-deśair anyatānavacchedāt tulyayos tataḥ pratipattiḥ |
tārakaṁ sarva-viṣayaṁ sarvathā-viṣayam akramaṁ ceti vivekajaṁ jñānam

Discriminative knowledge (of the self and the non-self) arises through *samyama* meditation on successive moments. This discriminative knowledge fosters an extraordinary ability to distinguish between things that closely resemble each other in their origin, time, and space. This supreme wisdom of discrimination, encompassing everything – the inner nature, external objects, and their positions – is known as *taraka-viveka-jnana*, the liberating knowledge of discrimination. **Patanjali Yoga Sutras 3.52–54**

Increasing awareness of this brings us closer to an essential understanding of ourselves. Within this flowing movement, in the experienced time, in duration, there is no fragmented past, present and future. This singular flow continuously adds to the entirety of the past, enriching and altering it at each moment, while simultaneously pushing forward and projecting itself into the future. The present constantly becomes the past. Bergson posits that we cannot discern when perception transitions into memory, thereby making the present the precise moment when the future transforms into the past. We can experience this for ourselves, even in our daily activities, if we place

ourselves in the flow of consciousness instead of our thoughts and feelings (which are external manifestations, movements).[N2]

The better we grasp this concept, the more directly we experience the life impulse, the dynamic, creative, effective time (i.e. duration), along with the intuition it embodies, and the innate, spontaneous, self-existent knowledge inherent in life impulse and consciousness. Bergson often mentions that intuition is difficult to hold for long periods. This is indeed true, because our intellect, once it becomes aware of what is "happening", that we are in the flowing movement, tries to grasp it in order to analyse it. Since the intellect breaks time into moments, and continuous change into snapshots, as soon as it tries to take possession of intuition, it immediately loses it, interrupting the continuity with its own natural operation. Nevertheless, this process can be cultivated, and as we learn to "flow", our ability to remain within duration and intuition strengthens. This is not an extraordinary ability; rather, it has simply been overshadowed by more pragmatic operations necessary for navigating the world.

The aforementioned process closely resembles Vedic contemplation or meditation. In order to dissolve the identification with thoughts and feelings, we begin to observe them, so that as a contemplator we can step out of identification with them and reach a state of consciousness in which we ourselves are the witnessing consciousness and not the object being contemplated. By directing our meditation towards the supreme reality, we can attain knowledge, or the unity and the true essence of existence. In a sense, yoga becomes complete when we practice and realize unity in diversity.[3]

However, it is crucial to emphasize that the source of existence is not nothingness or non-existence, but rather its opposite: completeness (refer to Part I, Chapter 1 for more details). Therefore, Reality is not achieved by producing a static and empty mental state, but by concentrating and directing our mind and consciousness toward Reality. Forcing the cessation of consciousness is futile, as without reaching to the Absolute, it results in mere emptiness. Consciousness is a continuous flow, thus the nature of meditation is necessarily characterized by flow.

N2 Bergson's work is explored in his major books:

Creative Evolution (Henry Holt & Co., 1913); *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999); *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1935); *Mind-energy – Lectures and Essays*. (Macmillan, 1920); *The Creative Mind* (Philosophical Library, 1946); *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness.* (Dover Publications, 2001); *Duration and Simultaneity* (The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965); *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Dover Publications, 2005); *Matter and Memory* (George Allen and Unwin, 1911).

For the purpose of this book, the language of the translations has been adapted to modern usage. Additionally, terms associated with the Vedic and yoga traditions have been employed to facilitate a clear synthesis of ideas.

This flow stops of itself and becomes a state when consciousness merges with the object of its meditation, its own source, the original self (the Absolute, also known as God).

Consciousness flows towards its object smoothly and uninterruptedly, like oil, mirroring the aspirant's meditation. Meditation, or dhyana, resembles the focused act of gently pouring oil from one vessel to another, representing a continuous, peaceful, unbroken stream of thought. Throughout the journey towards enlightenment or *samadhi*, a singular pattern of consciousness persists, thus the "flow" persists until the very end of the process.

sasya praśāntavāhitā saṁskārāt |
sarvārthataikāgratayoḥ kṣayodayau cittasya samādhipariṇāmaḥ

The peaceful flow of transition (of the tranquil mind) is ensured by the emergence of a new, continuous pattern of consciousness. The state of transition to supramental is achieved when the mind ceases to be focused on myriad things and is replaced by one-pointed concentration. **Patanjali Yoga Sutras 3.10–11**

This flow ceases when the observer and the observed merge into one. Hence, rather than mechanically emptying the mind as an ultimate goal, it is more beneficial to cultivate the peaceful flow of consciousness. The nature of Reality is not emptiness, but completeness.

Ancient traditions maintain that among all living forms (who are expressing themselves through their behaviour), humans are the most advanced due to their capacity for self-expression and realization of Truth beyond sensory perception. Using memory, imagination, and intuition, we can comprehend and internalize nature's laws, utilizing these seemingly enigmatic forces for inner development. The human body is the most perfect vehicle for the expression of consciousness.[4]

yatroparamate cittaṁ niruddhaṁ yoga-sevayā
yatra caivātmanātmānaṁ paśyann ātmani tuṣyati

When the inner sense (*chitta*), the complex mind is regulated by the practice of yoga and the extinction of the stream of consciousness has taken place (attained quietude), the yogi by his limited self (the quiet, detached and purified mind) glimpses the Real Self or the *Atman* and becomes fully content in It. **Bhagavad Gita 6.20**

To grasp this process, it is important to understand the different states of consciousness. The first is the waking consciousness (*vaishvanara*, the self of wakefulness), in which consciousness turns outward and becomes aware of external objects. In the dream state (*taijasa*, the dream self), the subconscious mind predominates, making dreams a means of fulfilling repressed fears and desires. This state also encompasses imagination and daydreaming. With mastery in yoga practice and self-discipline, one can maintain a concentrated state of mind or one-pointedness even in the dream state, transcending the realm of instincts (the subconscious mind) and immersing in the state of absolute completeness (*samadhi*). This is the conscious state of deep sleep (*prajna*, intuitive knowledge, gnosis) in which the mind's fluctuations and alternations cease. While the ordinary person has no recollection of this state, a meditation practitioner can maintain awareness in it. Beyond these three states lies the fourth (*turiya*), the transcendental state of primordial self, the source of all things.[5]

yatra supto na kan cana kāman kāmayate
na kancana svapnaṁ pashyati tat suṣuptam
suṣupta-sthāna eki-bhutah prajñāna-ghana evānanda
mayo hyānanda-bhuk ceto-mukhah prājñas tritiyah pādāḥ

When the sleeping person no longer desires any sensory objects, nor dreams of anything, that is the conscious state of deep sleep, the state of *sushupti*. When one exists on this plane of consciousness, that is *prajna*, the undivided, intuitive knowledge, and one is the enjoyer of the bliss of pure consciousness, the face of which is wisdom, and this is the third leg (or state) of the self. **Mandukya Upanishad 5**

tameva dhīro vijñāya prajñāṃ kurvīta brāhmaṇaḥ nānudhyāyādbahūñchabdān

The intelligent seeker of *Brahman*, the Absolute Truth, must consciously attain intuitive knowledge (*prajna*) by concentrating on *Brahman* alone. **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.21 (excerpt)**

na sandṛśe tiṣṭhati rūpam asya na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainam
hṛdā manīṣā manasābhiklṛpto ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti

Its form is not within the range of vision; there are no eyes that can see it. It is revealed through the intuitive intellect that guides the mind and through constant meditation. One who knows all this becomes immortal. **Katha Upanishad 2.3.9**

Depending on what portion of people's attention is directed outward or inward in certain ages, human life can be predominantly matter-focused, but the search for the essence of life, for the soul or God, can still be present. The Western and Eastern schools of spiritual philosophy, rooted in a common tradition, have maintained their theories and practices since ancient times, allowing us to tap into their reality at any time. The connection between matter and the real self or the soul exists even if, in certain ages, it becomes blurred and its significance is lost. When true knowledge seems to be lost, attention turns to external things, making it impossible to find real solutions.

Outward-focused people, neglecting their real self, their soul, typically turn to matter, to science (that analyses matter), and to the thought and philosophy that emanates from them, and expect them to answer fundamental questions regarding the purpose of life, the source of existence, the nature of free will, and how one should live in accordance with them. However, in the absence of transcendence, we tend to regard ourselves as the basis and essence of existence, purely relying on the mind, which is incapable of transcending the problem or the question itself (being on the same plane as the problem or question). Science and reason can only perceive and analyse different parts of a whole, drawing conclusions about the whole from the fragments. However, they often perceive reality in a static and fragmented manner, focusing only on frozen, momentary states. It leads to impersonality, mechanical thinking, and the notion of a predetermined existence. This approach misses the essence of reality, which is dynamic and flow-like. Reality is organic, self-created, and self-expressive, constituting a totality rather than just a part. It cannot be fully comprehended by the analysis of its isolated parts. True knowledge comes from perceiving the evolving process as a whole and understanding evolution in its entirety. Thus, life or existence is more than just matter, and more than what the intellect can grasp of it. It also encompasses the real self that is perceived as the other end of the scale.

Reason is drawn to the regularity, predictability and constancy of matter, seeing only one aspect of existence. Our consciousness, on the other hand, perceives a different dimension when it recognizes the incessant change and renewal within us, or when it expansively perceives the endlessly evolving and flowing development of nature. The issue occurs when the intellect, having applied a certain method of understanding to one aspect of existence, inappropriately extends the same method to other aspects, functioning in ways it is not inherently designed for.[6] This misapplication leads to a limited and often inaccurate perception of the broader, more dynamic nature of reality. However, as we will explore, the intellect does have an important role to play. It is that very part of us that can strive to transcend itself and open up to intuition and extended awareness.

Intuition as a Method

Intellect and intuition – The essence and nature of intuition, its value and application

We will devote a separate chapter to the topic of intuition, however, due to its significance, we provide a brief introduction here. Bergson considered the human condition unique because, as he stated, "reason becomes free in the human being and in the human being only". This freedom enables us to progress through the stages of the evolution of consciousness. The intellect, while capable of expressing intuition, typically examines everything externally.[7] It can approach the object of its study closely but can't directly touch or truly know it, akin to the concept of convergence in mathematics. Thus, reason also represents a cognitive limitation. Bergson elevated intuition above reason, viewing it as a means of acquiring direct knowledge, and he rejected the matter-focused approach of his era, which relied solely on logic and science.

The intellect dissects matter, separating forms, be they living or inanimate, and fails to grasp the continuity and interconnectedness from which these forms emerge. Thus, it fails to grasp the intrinsic interconnectedness of everything and the ceaseless creative evolution. It perceives everything as static states and struggles to conceive novelty. Bergson described reason as naturally unable to comprehend life. Instinct, conversely, aligns directly with life's flow, carrying its entire past and creative intention, expressing it unconsciously. To truly understand life, reason should emulate instinct, transcending its limitations to consciously follow and express life's flow and inherent impulse. This leads to intuition, which Bergson described as disinterested, self-aware instinct.[8]

In his essay "*Introduction to Metaphysics*", Bergson elaborates: "We call intuition here the sympathy (a mental sympathy or conscious identification) by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, common to that object and to others. Analyzing then consists in expressing a thing in terms of what is not it."[9] This conscious identification enables us to become one with the object of contemplation, understanding its true, essential reality, akin to *samapatti* or fusion in Eastern tradition, where the cognizer, cognition, and the object of cognition merge.

kṣīṇa-vṛtter abhijātasy-eva maṇer grahītṛ-grahaṇa-
grāhyeṣu-tatstha-tadañjanatā-samāpattiḥ

Once the mind's fluctuations cease, the yogi's mind (*chitta*) becomes clear like a diamond, enabling the merger of the knower, the knowledge, and the object knowledge. **Patanjali Yoga Sutras 1.41**

However, it's crucial to discern our focus during contemplation: whether it's on a living or inanimate object, or directed towards the Reality of all things. Merging with something provides deep knowledge of it, but not necessarily a complete, perfect understanding. When applied to the knowledge of the source of all existence, isolated knowledge is replaced by self-existent, universal, and perfect consciousness (*samadhi*), allowing direct knowledge of the absolute Truth.

Bergson posited that intuition and direct experience serve as pathways to a deeper understanding of reality and life, achievable through intellectual effort, the practice of intuition, and immersion in duration. In this context, true knowledge is perceived as an understanding of duration, grasping the flowing present and the wholeness of undivided consciousness. To truly know something goes beyond mere intellectual comprehension; it requires direct experience and a unification with the subject in consciousness. Hence, the practice of intuition and contemplative consciousness is essential in facilitating this profound understanding. Such insight into reality, the authentic self, and existence is indicative of the next stages in the evolution of consciousness. While Bergson did not specifically detail the various stages of intuition – ranging from temporary flashes and brief appearances to the emergence of permanent and intense illumination and truth – we intend to delve deeper into these aspects in Part V of this work, drawing upon Sri Aurobindo's teachings. This exploration will aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of intuition's progression, from its fleeting glimpses to its more sustained and profound states of enlightenment. By examining these stages, we seek to illuminate the path toward a more essential and enduring comprehension of truth and reality, as envisaged in both Bergson's philosophy and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teachings.

To summarize, Bergson viewed intuition as a developed, practical method of direct knowing, contrasting indirect knowledge solely derived from intellectual inquiry. He suggested that by reversing the intellect's outwardly focus inward, through concentration and one-pointedness, intuition can be attained, revealing the inner truth and reality of all things. In essence, it's not about what a thing appears to be, but what it truly is. In subsequent chapters, we'll examine the coherence and efficacy of this method. However, as we attempt to understand this through the limited consciousness of the intellect, we must continually revisit and elevate our understanding, and most importantly, experience it firsthand. Hence, the same arguments and calls to recognize fundamental truths will recur, necessary until we can transform our own perceptions. The ultimate goal is to expand consciousness, and so we will discuss the connections in an upward, widening spiral.

For Bergson, a transcendent completeness exists above and behind everything, yet remains experienceable. He sought to reconcile consciousness and perception with life's primordial movement, as opposed to a reason-based view that divides matter into separate entities.[10]

oṁ pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate

The Invisible Absolute, or *Brahman*, is inherently perfect and complete. This perfection ensures that its emanation, the visible universe, also embodies completeness and perfection. Consequently, even though countless perceivable entities originate from the Absolute, *Brahman* perpetually retains its state of unchanging completeness and perfection. **Ishavasya Upanishad Invocation**

This articulates the possibility of finding unity in a world of diversity. Intuition is the means to attain supramental consciousness and re-enter reality's flow, transcending the limitations of mere intellectual understanding.

The Work of Bergson

The philosopher of life theory – Beyond reason – A glimpse into reality

La filosofie, c'est une inquiétude.
Philosophy is restlessness.

Bergson emerges as a pivotal figure in modern Western philosophical thought, particularly for developing the concept of "creative evolution". This concept posits that we can directly experience and co-create with reality, thereby participating in our own evolution. Bergson illuminated the depths of consciousness and reality, necessitating a new understanding of time – what he termed "duration". This "duration", also called lived or experienced time, represents the quality of the soul and the actual experience of change. It is qualitative, perceptible, and inseparably linked to consciousness. To access this dimension, Bergson emphasized the role of intuition, placing it at the core of metaphysics. He outlined its nature and developmental theory, positioning this kind of cognition as ancient, aimed at perceiving the essence of life and the real self, transcending mere intellectual knowledge. Intuition, according to Bergson, allows one to directly experience and perceive the existence and essence of things. However, since the intellect struggles to fully

comprehend intuition, it often attempts to confine and conceptualize it. Once intuition is achieved, one can experience "duration" – the "time" of consciousness, characterized as a continuous, free, and creative flow, where the past enriches the present and anticipates the future without constraining it.

In Bergson's era, the prevailing philosophical and scientific views dismissed the possibility of exploring the world of the soul. Most philosophers focused on lesser matters, and science had usurped the role of both religion and philosophy in answering life's fundamental questions. However, they sought the answers in matter by the reason as a tool. Bergson from his youth, delved into consciousness, shedding new light on the essence of life, the body-soul or body-consciousness relationship, and the concept of freedom. His approach requires us to not only consider what he observed and deduced but to follow his method and directly experience this higher consciousness and the world beyond the mind. This direct approach brings us closer to the truth, as intuition allows us to transition from the relative to the absolute.

Bergson's exploration reveals that ordinary perception, reason, and logic, while useful, fall short in providing a profound understanding of the world, its origins, and the intricate relationship between them. He started his exploration with matter, examining it to trace back to its fundamental source. In doing so, Bergson recognized the soul or real self's capability to intuitively perceive its connection across various levels of consciousness.[N3] This inner consciousness or self-awareness offers a form of inner knowledge that contrasts sharply with reason, which typically tends to analyse, classify, atomize, and objectify reality, often reducing life to a series of repetitive elements. Contrary to the scientific approach that attempts to understand the soul from a materialistic viewpoint, Bergson uncovered an inner reality. He identified the real self and its life force as the driving forces behind the world's evolution, with reason and matter being mere external manifestations. He viewed life as the very nature of the real self, which expresses and creates through its own development.

Intuition, according to Bergson, uncovers a reality that is intellectually challenging to follow. Yet, it is our desire for and love of reality that enables us to connect with and comprehend this philosophical and metaphysical thought process. This method allows us to access the inner essence of life and reflect on both its object and itself. The real self, just like life, is indivisible and unitary, thus the reason’s method of dividing matter into parts is inadequate for investigating the real self and life, which are qualitative and dynamic. These are not merely the sum of their parts; they are not homogeneous entities but are dynamic, heterogeneous, multifaceted, and complex. In the real self

[N3] In this work, the terms "soul", "real self", "self-awareness", "consciousness", and "spirit" are used interchangeably to describe the inherent and essential essence of being. This essence represents a spiritual and central entity that exists above the mind, transcendent and universal, and an individual, embodied existence.

everything is interrelated and synergistic within the organic whole, characterized by duration, unity, and indivisibility.

"Our time (duration, subjective time) creates and forms something new at every moment. Each moment encompasses (knowingly or unknowingly) our entire past, including the histories of our ancestors. The past, far from being inert, actively influences our present; it lives in our bodies and souls, shaping our entire being. Therefore, every present moment is fundamentally distinct from its preceding ones, containing more of the past and adding new experiences to it." (Babits writes in his essay on Bergson.)[11]

Bergson critiques the intellect's tendency to dissect the world into discrete names, forms, ideas, and objects. In contrast to reality's nature as a living, ever-changing, and continuous stream, the intellect approaches life through static, isolated snapshots. When we remove these conceptual barriers, the true essence of reality becomes perceivable and experiential. Pure instinct, in its undiluted form, aligns with and directly connects to life, in contrast to reason, which is more relational, indirect, and reconstructive in nature. He posits that reason and instinct represent two distinct forms of cognition, emerging from a single principle that manifests internally in instinct and externally in reason. Instinct is intimately connected with life and aligns directly with the organic entirety of existence. It is less about analysis and more about an innate understanding and connection with the living world, thereby being primarily associated with the vital plane. In contrast, reason operates in a more relational, indirect, presuppositional, and reconstructive manner. It tends to analyse, categorize, and rationalize, making it inherently aligned with the mental plane. Reason excels in structuring and understanding life from an analytical perspective, often focusing on external realities. Intuition, however, represents a higher function of consciousness that remains inactive when our focus is predominantly outward, particularly on material aspects. In such states, consciousness is aligned with matter, functioning predominantly as reason. It transcends the limitations of both instinct and reason, offering a more profound and direct understanding of reality that goes beyond the mere physical or mental grasp of things.

The intellect, characterized by its epistemological approach, dissects parts in relation to their conditions, maintaining a static view of time as divided into past, present, and future. Reality, however, is grasped through a "theory of life" approach, which considers beings in relation to the organic unity of life within the undivided, creative time ("duration"). While concepts are necessary for cognition, the subjective and creative evolution of reality cannot be fully comprehended by the intellect alone, as it transcends intellectual reasoning and is grounded in experiential knowledge.

Bergson's philosophical journey was marked by a progressive deepening of his insights into reality, informed by both his inner experiences and external observations. He highlighted the

limitations of the philosophical and scientific approaches of his time, initially leveraging biology and natural science to analyze the real self and its manifestations. However, he discovered that understanding the soul provides the key to comprehending nature, rather than the reverse. This led him to a comprehensive view where life is perceived as the vehicle of the soul. In this view, our lives are integral parts of a greater being, emerging from and deriving benefits from this interconnected existence. Bergson emphasizes the significance of 'lived time' — a concept that transcends the mechanical or segmented notions of time. He contrasts the dynamic and creative nature of lived experience with the monotony of mechanical repetition and routine. In this view, each present moment includes the entirety of the past, and is continuously enriched, as new experiences augment this accumulation. By looking inward, we can grasp duration, the psychological time, directly experiencing consciousness. For Bergson, duration is the time and flow of consciousness, and the indivisibility of perennial being.

"In my *Essay* (*An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*) I brought the concept of freedom to the forefront, while in *Matter and Memory*, I endeavoured to make the reality of spirit tangible. In *Creative Evolution* I illustrated the reality of creation itself, leading to the concept of a creative and free God who shapes matter and continues creative efforts through the evolution of species and individuals. This perspective challenges both monism and pantheism. However, I acknowledge that delving deeper into these ideas, would require a different approach, particularly the analysis of moral questions, which I am hesitant to publish unless I could demonstrate results as effectively as in my other works." (From a letter of 20 February 1912.)[12]

Spiritual reality, or the world of the soul, cannot be fully understood through the scientific methodologies applied to matter. The real self is known through intuition, a qualitative process distinct from the quantitative determinism of physical laws. This intuition allows us to transcend natural limitations, offering a form of freedom that seems to emanate from consciousness itself.

Due to the innovative nature of his philosophy, many of Bergson's contemporaries and critics found it difficult to grasp or enter into his method of understanding the flow of life. Yet, this does not diminish the reality that Bergson's method revealed. His philosophy was not marked by radical shifts but was a continuous, evolving exploration that resisted prevailing ideas and eventually disrupted European thought patterns. He recognized that reason and intuition could harmonize and that matter and consciousness were not contradictory. Utilizing the concepts of subjective time and life-force, Bergson successfully established a connection between the world as we experience it and the world as delineated by science and reason. He saw the cooperation of scientific thought and philosophy as essential since intuition utilizes and transcends the faculties of reason, enabling a more comprehensive grasp of reality. Reality possesses a richness that often eludes our surface self, which is primarily outward-looking, engaged in communication and action. In contrast, our deeper self, or the real self,

underpins this external facade with a more expansive consciousness. This deeper aspect of our being offers a more profound and comprehensive understanding of reality, operating from a background rich with intuition, insight, and a broader perspective.[13]

Bergson viewed humanity's ascent as a straightforward, albeit challenging journey, reflecting the evolution of the real self. He believed in our inherent right and duty to evolve towards a divine state, embodying perfect, extended, infinite, and eternal consciousness. He emphasized that self-control and goal-oriented cooperation are crucial for achieving and maintaining freedom. Bergson posits that mutual love and justice are essential for achieving the outcomes humanity currently resists. He emphasizes that since the soul is not actively present, consciousness encounters obstacles and its ability to manifest is limited. This idea is echoed in his work *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, where he reflects on the Creator's generosity: "It is hard to conceive a love which is, so to speak, at work, and yet is not directed to anything. As a matter of fact, the mystics unanimously bear witness that God needs us, just as we need God. Why should He need us unless it be to love us?"[14] This statement underscores the belief that the cosmic energy, constituting human beings and the world, is a manifestation of divine love, desiring to express itself through us, allowing us to partake in the richness, essence, and joy of being.

In his exploration, Bergson delved into the meaning of freedom, which is the expression of the soul's free action, that can lead us to our own deepest essence. He acknowledged the necessity of the body for self-expression, to materialize ideas into tangible actions. His study of the mystics' experiences with God, in relation to the soul, freedom, and life, revealed to him the key to spiritual renewal: individuality, inspiration, and the examples set by saints and sages are all vital for humanity's ascent to higher consciousness. Freedom, according to Bergson, is central to our lives, characterizing the soul and manifesting in actions that transcend lower consciousness and the limitations of intellect, mind, vital force, and body. He viewed evolution as the working of a conscious force that starts from matter but transcends its material confines. This creative source, inherent in our consciousness, becomes liberated through intuition, enabling us to fully engage with and understand the essence of evolution and self-development. It has a divine origin, and all beings manifest this as a creative light and consciousness from within. Mystics, having tapped into this outpouring of life, have accessed the ultimate source: the creative love of God.

"Creation is a complicated process, struggling with matter, woven together in a thousand ways, but its source is a single, simple creative impulse, which is God itself, and whose essence mystical knowledge can approach with no better word than this: love." (Following Bergson's philosophy, Babits writes in the *Nyugat*.)[15] This profound statement highlights that the origin of all things, the primal self or God, is fundamentally love, defining the ultimate essence, purpose, and meaning of all existence.

Bergson's quest was to understand where consciousness resides and originates, and through this journey, he awakened the potential for transcendence in humanity. His impact on 20th-century thought, literature, and science is profound and far-reaching. His insightful ideas and innovative concepts have become a lasting part of intellectual discourse, laying a foundation for future generations. His work has been instrumental in steering people towards a deeper exploration of the soul and God, and in opening up the world to spirituality. Bergson's philosophy serves as a catalyst, inspiring people to seek beyond the tangible and explore the realms of higher consciousness and understanding. His contributions have enriched our understanding of the human experience, offering pathways to deeper insight and a more profound connection with the essence of our being.

Overview of the Vedic Tradition and the Science of Yoga

The ages of spirituality and the soul's journey on the path of truth – The teachings of the mystics – The supramental reality of existence and the possibility of inner development

The *Vedas* contain the highest spiritual truth comprehensible to the mind. As the intellect evolves, it progresses towards ever higher levels of knowledge, continually renewing and expanding upon previous understandings while making new discoveries. The *Veda* has given rise to numerous religious movements and metaphysical philosophies, forming the origin and foundation of all that is true. As described by Sri Aurobindo, the *Rig Veda*, a collection of sacrificial hymns written in an ancient language, holds a psychological and universal inner meaning, understood only by the initiated. Its apparent meaning conveys a natural religion to the people. When the symbols are interpreted for their hidden meanings, a coherent set of spiritual, psychological, and religious ideas emerges, illuminating the elusive passages of the *Upanishads* and the origins of the *Puranas*. This coherent interpretation confirms India's ancient tradition, demonstrating that *Vedanta*, *Purana*, *Tantra*, various philosophical schools, and the major Indian religions all have Vedic origins. It also sheds light on the obscurities of religions, cults, and myths at a universal level.

In Vedic times, thinking was based on inner experience, suggestions of the intuitive mind, inspired knowledge, and real impressions that conveyed knowledge beyond ordinary perception. The realities of mind and soul were tangible, not abstract or separate. This era was followed by the age of intellectual philosophy, marked by logical thinking, which gave rise to the *Upanishads*, *Vedanta*, *Sankhya*, and *Yoga*. While these texts were knowledge-centric and set liberation as the

ultimate goal, the *Vedas* were action-centric, challenging our bondages and obstacles to achieve self-realization.

Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that the path outlined in the *Vedas* is the soul's journey along the path of Truth, opening new vistas of light and power to the seeker who, through persistent effort, gains spiritual wealth. It involves both inner and outer efforts, enabling the aspirant to discover and conquer unattainable planes of thought and experience. Progress in the mortal realm is made possible by the omnipresent divine light, power, and love. The goal is enlightenment, attained by the seer of truth and knowledge. This knowledge originates from the Infinite resonating through intuition to the inner hearing. To receive inspiration, aspirants must train themselves for it. As they become a sage, these hymns – the instruments of spiritual development and self-expression – are born from their soul, manifesting the immanent god and annihilating ignorance.

eto nv adya sudhyo bhavāma pra ducchunā minavāmā varīyaḥ
āre dveṣāṁsi sanutar dadhāmāyāma prāñco yajamānam accha
etā dhiyaṁ kṛṇavāmā sakhāyo ′pa yā mātāṁ ṛṇuta vrajaṁ goḥ

Come now, today let us become perfected in thought, let us destroy suffering and unease, let us embrace the higher good, let us put far away from us all hostile things (all the things that attack and divide); let us go forward towards the Master of the sacrifice. Come, let us create the Thought, O friends, which is the Mother (Aditi or the Dawn, the infinite Being and Consciousness) and destroy the cave that hides the light. **Rig Veda 5.45.5–6a**

The collection of hymns in the *Vedas* marks the culmination of the age of intuition, celebrating the inner journey of the ancient mystics. Then subsequent generations turned towards the achievements of physical life, intellect, and logical thinking, gradually moving away from the ancient truths. The mystics' system, rooted in complex experiences, required faculties that were rudimentary and imperfect in their descendants. As a result, these ancient truths were gradually forgotten.

Subsequent epochs of spirituality endeavoured to rediscover and articulate these ancient thoughts and experiences. This re-exploration occurred through the details and meanings of the rituals in Brahmanical literature and the meditations of sages on ancient mantras in the Upanishadic literature. Through their intuition, these sages revealed the innermost essence, purpose, and ancient truths of the *Veda* in a new form. This process made the main philosophical and psychological ideas of the ancients, along with their methods of experience and intuition, accessible once again. This revival and reinterpretation led to the unfolding of the *Veda* into *Vedanta*.

Vedanta, however, represented a divergence from Vedic tradition, and separated thought and culture due to two significant tendencies. Firstly, it de-emphasized the value of sacrifice for spiritual ends, disrupting the balance between outer and inner life, as well as between material and spiritual life. This new balance leaned towards renunciation (and became overexaggerated in Buddhism). Secondly, *Vedanta* adopted clearer, more philosophical language, moving away from symbolic language and imagery. This shift rendered Vedic rituals and texts seemingly obsolete, with the *Upanishads*, known for their clearer and more direct language, becoming the new foundation of Indian thought. Despite these transformations, the ancient realization still resides within us; our ancestors trod this path, which remains open to us today.[16]

aṇoraṇīyānmahato mahīyānātmāsya jantornihito guhāyāṃ
tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuḥ prasādānmahimānamātmanaḥ

The real self (*Atman*) is subtler than the subtlest, greater than the greatest, and hidden in the cave of the heart of every being. One who is tranquil and free from the desires of the mind and senses, perceives the majesty of the real self and is thus freed from all sorrow. **Katha Upanishad 1.2.20**

dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā samānaṁ vṛkṣaṁ pari-ṣasvajāte
tayor anyaḥ pippalaṁ svādvattyanaśnann anyo abhi cākaśīti
samāne vṛkṣe puruṣo nimagno 'niśayā śocati muhyamānaḥ
juṣṭaṁ yadā paśyaty motheram īśam asya mahimānam iti vīta-śokaḥ

Two birds with beautiful wings, representing the soul embodied in the human being and the Higher Self of the universe (two great friends), nest together on the tree of existence. The soul incarnate in the human enjoys the fruits of this tree, experiencing both joy and suffering. In contrast, the Higher Self (*Paramatman*) is merely an observer, without partaking. The soul, realizing of the glory and infinite power of the Higher Self, is thus liberated, and soars once again as the silent witness banishes all its anxiety. **Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1–2**

Based on the intellectuality of the *Upanishads*, the symbols, and the elaborate psychological systems, it becomes evident that spiritual knowledge existed in the form of secret teachings: wrapped in concrete and material forms that protected it from the profane and revealed it to the initiated. The fundamental principle of the mystics was self-knowledge and the sanctity of truth. To the masses, it promoted the practice of external worship, emphasizing rituals and ceremonies. In contrast, for the

initiated, it revealed the profound inner science of self-knowledge. Even today, these teachings hold spiritual significance for those who have undergone a process of spiritual purification and awakening.

na hi jñānena sadṛśaṁ pavitram iha vidyate
tat svayaṁ yoga-saṁsiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati
śraddhāvā labhate jñānaṁ tat-paraḥ saṁyatendriyaḥ
jñānaṁ labdhvā parāṁ śāntim acireṇādhigacchati
ajñaś cāśraddadhānaś ca saṁśayātmā vinaśyati
nāyaṁ loko 'sti na paro na sukhaṁ saṁśayātmanaḥ

In this world transcendental knowledge is the purest and most sublime. Through the practice of yoga, one gradually perfects oneself and uncovers this knowledge within the real self (*Atman*). This journey requires strong faith, mastery and control over one's senses, and consciousness focused on the Supreme Reality. Those who commit to this path attain enlightenment and supreme peace. However, doubt, ignorance, and a lack of faith obstruct this spiritual journey. Doubting the existence of the real self leads to discontentment, not just in this world but also in any higher realms. **Bhagavad Gita 4.38–40**

The unmanifest or supramental planes of existence are shrouded in mystery, veiled by layers that make them inaccessible to ordinary perception and understanding. But these higher planes are ever-present, and the aspirant can gradually access them to realize their true nature. This evolutionary journey within one’s own self is symbolized by the concept of "sacrifice" and the "sacrificial year", illustrating how our limited consciousness can transcend its boundaries and connect with supramental reality.

Yoga serves as an effective means to facilitate this journey. Its practices guide us inward first, fostering self-awareness and self-discovery. From there, we ascend to the heights of our being and personality, aiming to unify the Absolute with its nature in a state of liberated and perfected human existence. Yoga harmonizes our inner and outer lives, supporting the unfolding of the real self and the manifestation of its energy. From this spiritual perspective, humans are the expressions and symbols of a higher being that has descended into the material world. Here, our lower nature has the opportunity to transform and adopt the characteristics of the higher nature. Simultaneously, the higher nature reveals itself within our mundane existence. With this, life embraces the practice of conscious yoga that is connected with the real self.

Yoga represents a systematic effort to enhance and express the latent potential within humans. As both humans and the universe manifest aspects of a universal and transcendent Being, the culmination of this endeavour is the merging of the individual with this ultimate reality. In essence, life itself can be seen as the yoga of nature, striving consciously and unconsciously to realize its own perfection, to express its untapped potential, and to unite with its divine origin. It is in the human being that nature develops self-conscious tools and intentional functions as means to achieve this goal. The various systems of yoga are, in fact, a collection of these general methods, refined through experimentation and practical analysis to produce solid results. They are tailored psychological processes that elevate everyday functions to a higher level of expression, revealing capabilities inherent in humans but not typically manifested in daily life.

For instance, *Raja Yoga* involves isolating, reorganizing, transforming, and synthesizing different aspects and forces of our inner structure, whereas *Hatha Yoga* focuses on mastering life forces and functions that ordinarily seem fixed but can be transformed. Other forms of yoga, like the yoga of devotion and the yoga of knowledge, tap into more intuitive aspects: the former seeks divine love and ecstasy, and the latter tends towards infinite divine consciousness and existence. These too start off of basic capacities within us, the mode and purpose of which we often overlook in their spontaneous operation.[17]

sukham ātyantikaṁ yat tad buddhi-grāhyam atīndriyam
vetti yatra na caivāyaṁ sthitaś calati tattvataḥ
yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ tataḥ
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate
taṁ vidyād duḥkha-saṁyoga viyogaṁ yoga-saṁjñitam
sa niścayena yoktavyo yogo 'nirviṇṇa-cetasā

When a yogi becomes content in the real self, they experience supreme spiritual bliss, a state of heightened awareness and intellectual discrimination that transcends material senses. In this established state, one never again strays from the truth. It is a pinnacle of spiritual attainment, beyond which there is nothing more to gain. Even the greatest sufferings cannot unsettle this deeply rooted tranquillity. Understanding and renouncing suffering is the essence of yoga. This form of meditation must be practiced with unwavering determination and a dispassionate mind, tirelessly pursuing this path. **Bhagavad Gita 6.21–23**

The soul stands at the pinnacle of universal existence, a hidden entity awaiting revelation, with matter serving as its foundation and the mind acting as a bridge between the two. The soul is eternal,

transcending the temporal nature of the mind and body, which are mere instruments in its quest for self-expression. In line with ancient traditions, the soul is envisioned as a reflection of the Lord of Yoga, utilizing its faculties to manifest this divine image in the world. Nature, in its entirety, is seen as an endeavour to manifest this hidden truth and the divine at increasingly higher levels. The divine purpose extends beyond the liberation of the individual, as individuals do not exist in isolation but are interconnected in a common existence.

The individual soul must adopt inner and outer senses (*antah-karana* or complex mind, along with sensory and motor functions) to manifest in the material world. These senses significantly shape our perceptions, experiences, and decisions. Consequently, our habitual thought patterns create a false sense of separation between the soul and matter (that seems very real). However, through meditation, one begins to realize that this separation doesn't exist. The experiencer and the experienced are not distinct but part of a unified reality.

Realizing our inherently divine and conscious nature leads to a new understanding of the external world. Everything in existence is interconnected; there is no separate or distinct existence. In the world, we must learn to see the divine through the diverse names and forms, recognizing the underlying unity in all diversity. Just as the Absolute Reality or *Brahman* manifests as the material world, we can trace our way back to this Reality through meditation.

Regular meditation fosters an integrated personality, transforming the world into a stage for experiencing bliss. The soul is the essence and reason for the existence of matter, while matter forms the soul's physical expression and means of interaction in the world. At the core of both soul and matter lies an unchanging, constant unity.[18]

I. The World as the Manifestation of Consciousness

1. Matter and its Origin

The relationship between matter, life and extended mentality – Automatism, instinct, intuition, freedom – Manifestation of creation, descent and ascent – Reconciliation of the science of matter and the metaphysics of the soul

"Things have happened just as though an immense current of consciousness, interpenetrated with potentialities of every kind, had traversed matter..."[19] This was Bergson's view of the world, and this stream, the vital impulse of life (*élan vital*), is central to his philosophy. It represents a dynamic, evolving force propelling all of creation toward change and advancement. But what drives this life impulse itself? What shapes its intention, and how can we describe it?

This force is the energy of the real self, a stream of consciousness. It exists not as a static entity but through its activity, following the inherent impulse or intention of the real self. In this perspective, the manifested forms of existence, both in their gross and subtle physical aspects, are expressions of the real self. They materialize through the energy (consciousness) of the real self, according to causality. The manifestation process can be described as a movement from the inside outward (expressed in time as duration – the time of the real self, which is distinct from the time of the intellect), and this movement constitutes evolution itself. This view contrasts sharply with Darwinian evolutionary theory, which posits gross physical matter as the basis of evolution. Understanding these differences is crucial, as it influences our foundational beliefs about the nature of (our) existence and evolution. A thorough and personal investigation into these philosophical concepts is paramount, for it shapes the basis upon which we build our understanding of life and existence.

The inquisitive mind often ponders where creation originates: Is it come from “nothing” or from “something”, from non-being or being? Bergson challenges the concept of absolute nothingness as a viable idea. In *Two Sources*, he suggests that a significant portion of metaphysics grapples with the question of why anything exists at all. Why is there matter, soul (consciousness), or even God, instead of nothingness? However, this question presupposes that reality fills a void, implying that behind existence lies the deeper reality of nothingness. Bergson argues that this is a fallacy, akin to imagining a square circle because the idea of absolute nothingness is inherently contradictory.[20] Life, in his view, is characterized by continuous creation and fulfilment in time, and so 'nothingness'

should be understood not as a complete absence of anything, but as a state where life has yet to manifest or is in the process of doing so.

According to Bergson, the foundation of the world's existence is the "real self" (as the philosopher might term it) or "God" (as the mystic sage might call it). In *Mind-Energy*, he suggests that if we consider matter as an extension of the real self, we can then reevaluate the determinism of nature and explore the true relationship between the real self and nature without bias.[21] This perspective resonates with Vedic philosophy, which similarly views the origin of existence:

sad eva somyadamagra āsīd-ekam-eva-advitīyaṁ tadhaika āhur-asadevedamagra
āsīd-ekam-eva-advitīyaṁ tasmād asataḥ sajjāyata
kutastu khalu somya-ivaṁ syād-iti hovāca kathaṁ asataḥ sajjāyeta-iti
sattveva somyedam agra āsīd-ekam-eva-advitīyaṁ

My dear son, understand that at the very beginning, only *Brahman*, the Supreme Self was present, the cause of all that exists. It was a state of absolute oneness, with nothing else besides. You might hear some say that initially there was only non-existence, a void without any reality, and that from this nothingness everything emerged. But think about it, my dear, how can existence spring forth from non-existence? It seems illogical, doesn't it? In reality, before the dawn of creation, the Supreme Reality, *Brahman*, existed in solitude. It was the singular entity, an all-encompassing presence without any other one. **Chhandogya Upanishad 6.2.1–2**

"At a certain moment, in certain points of space, a visible current has taken rise; this current of life, traversing the bodies it has organized one after another, passing from generation to generation, has become divided amongst species and distributed amongst individuals without losing anything of its force, rather intensifying in proportion to its advancing. [...] ...life is like a current passing from germ to germ (from individual to individual) through the medium of a developed organisms."[22] The key point here is the continuity of limitless progress. As we delve deeper into observing the continuity of life, we realize that biological or organic development is closely aligned with the development of consciousness. In this process, the past seamlessly merges into the present, giving birth to new forms. Yoga views the world as a stage for subjective or conscious evolution, revealing that the evolution of consciousness is constantly reaching higher levels. Presently, humanity is on the cusp of attaining the supramental level of consciousness. This advanced state of awareness is gradually spreading across the Earth through those who are prepared, and subsequently to an increasing number of people.[23]

While life and consciousness incessantly create something new, reason, by its inherent nature, resists accepting the constant emergence of original and unpredictable phenomena. Reason, a product of life itself, primarily aims to logically predict and prepare for external events. It tends to grasp only those aspects of reality that resemble its previous experiences, operating on the principle of "the same becomes the same". This approach inherently overlooks or diminishes the unique, ever-renewing experiences of reality that continuously emanate from the source. (Or at least reduces them to the level of the intellect.) Therefore, the task of philosophy is to transcend mere understanding. By going beyond the intellect, philosophy aims to expand our realm of perception and experience, enabling us to embrace the full spectrum of life's dynamic and ever-evolving nature.

Duration forms the very foundation of our existence, embodying the substance and essence of all things. It acts as a continuity or thread, intertwining everything with all other elements in the universe. Along this thread, the central self of creation extends even to the minutest particle. The personal duration experienced by a human being is a unique phenomenon, impervious to stretching or shortening. Through personal experience, duration transcends relativity ("the world in relation to the me"), becoming absolute, essential, and central perception. The All, or the Absolute, is characterized by this unbroken continuity or duration. It is undivided, a quality shared by all that exists. As one delves deeper into the nature of time, it becomes evident that duration is not just a measure but an active process. It is the very invention and creation of forms, a ceaseless elaboration of the new. This understanding reveals that duration is not merely a passive passage of time but a dynamic force, continually shaping and reshaping the fabric of existence.[24]

mattaḥ parataraṁ nānyat kiñcid asti dhanañjaya
mayi sarvam idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva

(The Lord declared:) O conqueror of riches, there is no truth greater than Myself. All things in existence are upheld by Me, as pearls are strung upon a thread. **Bhagavad Gita 7.7**

ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate
iti matvā bhajante māṁ budhā bhāva-samanvitāḥ

I am the origin of both the spiritual and material realms; everything emanates from Me. The wise, recognizing this truth, worship Me with their whole hearts and complete devotion. **Bhagavad Gita 10.8**

viṣṭabhyāham idaṁ kṛtsnam ekāṁśena sthito jagat

Even with a mere fragment of My being, I permeate and sustain this entire universe. **Bhagavad Gita 10.42 (excerpt)**

In the Vedic tradition, there is a profound emphasis on the concept that everything in the universe exists simultaneously, though not all have manifested into our perceptible reality. A vivid representation of this idea is found in the analogy of the world being a sacrificial horse. This symbolizes that the Absolute itself becomes everything – thus, the creation of the world is akin to a sacrifice, and its creator is both the sacrificer and the sacrificed. This universal form, as it moves forward, facilitates creation, while simultaneously, destruction occurs behind it. As the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.1.1) eloquently states, "The front is the rising sun, the back is the setting sun." This metaphor illustrates the ongoing cycle of existence, where all things come into visible being and pass out of sight in a continuous flow. Everything already exists in potentiality, only becoming visible and tangible as part of the natural progression of the universe.

Bergson discerns two fundamental movements in existence: a descent and an ascent. The descending movement, he suggests, could very well unwind rapidly like a coil, unfold with great speed. Conversely, the ascending movement is integrally linked to this descent but involves a slower process of inner maturation and creation, its rhythm influencing the former. This duality reflects the interconnected nature of all existence, where each element is part of the greater whole.

Our perception may fragment matter into isolated entities, yet it's crucial to recognize that the entire universe and all living organisms share in "duration". This duration is a coherent part of a singular process, manifesting the flowing energy of existence. The past of all entities is intricately woven into the present, enriching it and remaining active, effective and influential. Each moment of the past, cumulatively, shapes the present. This continuity might be called "memory", which is not merely a recollection but an essential orientation – a constant consciousness of the past as a whole projected into the present, forming the basis of our conscious existence. Bergson also posits that matter and life are not just movements of differing rhythms but also of opposite directions. Matter can be seen as a cessation, a fragmentation of life. It represents a shift from freedom to necessity, from tension to relaxation, from movement to stillness; as if life regresses into death. However, matter is not isolated from life; it is, in fact, a creation of life.

The intellect, in its quest to understand the universe, segments and dissects the unity of existence, according to its own intellectual operations. Similarly, science isolates systems for examination, drawing conclusions and defining actions based on sensory observations, abstraction, and generalization. Bergson emphasized that science is most comfortable with dealing with inorganic, static matter, where its logic and methodologies find solid ground. However, in the realm of organic

life and vitality, science finds itself on less stable footing, as the dynamic and fluid nature of life often eludes strict logical frameworks. It is clearly visible, that the reason is focused on controlling and utilizing matter. Our decisions and the very structure of our reasoning are oriented toward this end. The challenge arises when we attempt to apply the part-oriented intellect to comprehend the whole.

Yet, reason is not entirely constrained; it possesses a greater capacity for everyday functioning and can adapt to some extent to the workings of the "real self" or the science of the soul, thereby operating effectively in the inner world. Historically, there was a practical rationale for reason's outward turn. Driven by the necessities of life and sustenance, our understanding of ourselves remains limited, while our study of the external world intensifies. To act effectively, we often need to externalize our consciousness, aligning it with the characteristics of matter. This external orientation of consciousness has profound implications for our understanding of both the world and ourselves.[25]

As we shift our focus from the isolated parts delineated by reason, we venture closer to the true essence of reality. Here, we observe that everything is in constant flux, never merely repeating or reproducing similar entities, but always birthing something new. This concept is encapsulated in the phrase, "...as if an accumulative memory of the past made it impossible it to turn back again."[26] This reflects the unbroken continuity of the development of a fetus into a complete organism. This same force that guides the fetus through various stages of existence also drives its growth, development, and eventual aging. The fetal existence, characterized by a continuous transformation of form, seamlessly transitions into life – this is the continuity of duration, where the past persists within the present, embodying the organic memory of the living being.

For inanimate or stationary objects, the present state is determined by the immediate past. However, in a living organism, the present is not a direct result of the preceding moment but is influenced by its entire history. This distinction highlights the difference between concrete and abstract time: concrete time pertains to the duration in which real systems evolve, while abstract time is a segmented, rationalized version created by the reason to contemplate artificial systems.

Scientific systems operate within a momentary present, detached from the real duration where the past seamlessly merges with the present. These systems are effectively “frozen” in time, designed to examine subjects in a static, unchanging manner. However, where there is progress, there exists a duration that bridges past and present. Studying natural systems allows us to comprehend the essence and the inner workings of duration, whereas with artificial systems, we only perceive the endpoints of this continuum. Life, in contrast, is a continual process of discovery and creation, a conscious activity characterized by perpetual change and a past that remains alive in the present. This concept of enduring

change and living past is common to both living beings and consciousness, highlighting the dynamic and interconnected nature of life and reality.

Reason, while inherently connected to reality, possesses the capability to transcend its focus on the material world. It can detach itself from the relative and embark on a quest to discover the source, the creator, the essence of life, and authentically represent these elements. In attempting to grasp the development of life, the limitations of intellect become apparent. However, this also illuminates the effort needed for the intellect to strengthen and expand its reach towards understanding the essence of life.[27]

Bergson conceptualizes the development of the world as a continuous transformation, a creation driven by the inherent power of consciousness. He poetically notes that "the doors of the future are wide open", suggesting boundless potentialities. In the current epoch, humanity represents the pinnacle of creation, a point from which it continues to evolve. Here, the vital impulse has achieved a certain degree of fulfilment, progressing towards conscious thought and reflective consciousness. It ascends mentally, guided by the same impulse that has been driving it since its inception.[28] In a similar vein, the *Bhagavad Gita* elucidates that the lower nature of consciousness perceives itself as a separate entity, while the higher nature recognizes its unity with the original self.

bhūmir āpo 'nalo vāyuḥ khaṁ mano buddhir eva ca
ahaṅkāra itīyaṁ me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā
apareyam itas tv anyāṁ prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām
jīva-bhūtāṁ mahā-bāho yayedaṁ dhāryate jagat

The eightfold division of my material nature (*Prakriti*) comprises earth, water, fire, air, space/ether, mind, intellect, and egoism or sense of self. This forms my (God's) inferior nature. In contrast, my superior nature sustains the material universe through the individual souls (*jiva-atman*), forming the basis of existence. **Bhagavad Gita 7.4–5**

mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ
manaḥ-ṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛti-sthāni karṣati

An eternal part of me (God) manifests in the living world as these individual souls, enveloped in material nature, encompassing the six senses, including the mind, which form the foundation of *Prakriti.* **Bhagavad Gita 15.7**

The ancient scriptures preserve various interpretations of the process of creation, often referred to as the primordial sacrifice. The ancient sages meditated on this process, seeking to understand it both within their own being and in the world around them. Their quest was to comprehend their place within the manifestation of the Absolute, recognizing that they themselves were embodiments of the Absolute. This symbolic meditation is frequently illustrated in the *Upanishads*, accompanied by detailed descriptions of rituals found in the *Vedas*, such as the horse sacrifice. These ritual elements are not merely external actions but serve as tools for inner contemplation. The sages mentally performed these sacrifices, meditating on the universal harmony and interconnectedness of all things. They recognized that every element has its unique place in the cosmos, contributing to the integrity of the whole. Thus, the entire world is envisioned as a grand sacrifice, an act of creation by the Absolute. It is as if the Absolute steps out of itself to create and manifest the diversity of existence.

nāsadāsīnno sadāsīttadānīṁ nāsīdrajo no vyomā paro yat
kimāvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmannaṁbhaḥ kimāsīdgahanaṁ gabhīraṁ
na mṛtyurāsīdamṛtaṁ na tarhi na rātryāhnaāsītpraketaḥ
ānīdavā taṁ svadhayā tadekaṁ tasmād dhānyanaparaḥ kiñcanāsa
tama'āsīttamasā gūhlamagre praketaṁ salilaṁ sarvamā idaṁ
tucchyenābhvapihitaṁ yadāsīttapasastanmahinā jāyataikaṁ
kāmastadagre samavartādhi manaso retaḥ prathamaṁ yadāsīt
sato bandhumasati niravindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā
tiraścīno vitato raśmir-eṣāmadhaḥ svidāsī dupari svidāsī
retaḥ-dhāḥ āsanmahimāna āsantsvadhā avastātprayatiḥ parastāt
ko addhā veda ka iha prāvocat kuta ājātā kuta iyaṁ visṛṣṭiḥ
arvāgdevā asya visarjanenāthā ko veda yat'ābabhūva
iyaṁ visṛṣṭiryata ābabhūva yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na
yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyomantso aṅga veda yadi vā na veda

In the beginning, neither being nor non-being existed, nor space, sky, nor anything beyond. What prevailed was an indescribable depth, a primordial ocean of consciousness. There was no death nor immortality, no distinction between day and night. Only the One existed, self-contained, breathing life without breath, alone in the void. Darkness enveloped everything, with cosmic water being the only presence. From this void, existence emerged through the power of austerity (*tapas*). The first spark of desire became the seed of existence and mind. The wise seers, who searched in their hearts for true knowledge, discovered the bond of being that manifests in non-being. They stretched this bond across to find out if there was something above and something below. The seed-givers and the

mighty forces occurred, below was the offering, above was the blessing achieved. But in the end, who truly knows, who is brave enough to speak of this? How did all creation happen, and only after its manifestation did the gods (the sustaining forces of creation) come? Who knows from what everything came? From what did this entire manifested creation originate, did it form through itself or not? Perhaps only he who looks down from the highest heaven knows all this, although it's possible that even he does not. **Rig Veda 10.129.1–7 (Nasadiya Sukta)**

sahasra-śīrṣā puruṣaḥ sahasrākṣaḥ sahasra-pāt
sa bhūmiṁ viśvato vṛtvā-tyātiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam
puruṣa evedaṁ sarvaṁ yad bhūtam yac ca bhavyam
utāmṛtatvasyeśāno yad annenātirohati
etāvānasya mahimāto jyāyāṁś ca pūruṣaḥ
pādo 'sya viśvā bhūtāni tripādasyāmṛtaṁ divi

Purusha, the universal being, manifests as the universe itself (with thousand heads, eyes, feet, etc.), with countless forms and pervading all existence. It gives life to all, independent yet intimately connected with every aspect of the cosmos. The universes, across time, are manifestations of this Supreme Being, expanding as *Purusha*. While *Purusha* controls immortality, it also manifests in the material universe, allowing individual selves to experience life. The material creation represents only a fraction (one-fourth) of *Purusha's* full expansion, with the vast majority residing in the eternal spiritual realm. **Rig Veda 10.90.1–3 (Purusha Sukta)**

yajñena yajñamayajanta devāstāni dharmāṇi prathamānyāsan
te ha nākaṁ mahimānaḥ sacanta yatra pūrve sādhyāḥ santi devāḥ

Through mental sacrifice and meditative realization of the cosmic process, utilizing *Virat Purusha*, the universal being, sages worship the master of the cosmic sacrifice (*yajna*). They realize the eternal, original laws of existence and, blessed with divine enlightenment, experience the liberating heaven that the primeval sages enjoyed at creation's dawn. **Rig Veda 10.90.16 (Purusha Sukta)**

When contemplating the process of creation, it might seem as though the world and its creatures emerge from nothingness or non-being. Yet, if we think about it deeper, out of nothing can only come nothing. This perceived emergence from nothingness is due to the limitations of our perception, which relies on space and time – dimensions that had not yet manifested during the

initial stages of creation. Fundamentally, everything exists within the infinite ocean (consciousness) of the real self, the source from which all manifestations arise. What we perceive as unconsciousness is essentially the real self immersing itself in the lower ocean, a reflection of the upper ocean or higher consciousness. Here, matter encapsulates the real self, leading to the evolutionary journey of life, entailing the cycle of life and death for mortal beings. In the absence of an observer, things remain unseen and uncomprehended, yet they are always contained by the original self. At this primordial stage, the seer and the seen are undivided; it is the Absolute itself that gradually manifests as creation across various levels, transforming itself into increasingly dense, physical forms (causal, subtle, and gross physical).

The Absolute is the supreme seer and perceiver of all, the being within all. Initially, only the observer exists; there is no distinct object to observe. The observer perceives everything within itself. The wise understand that this world is intrinsically linked to the Supreme, *Brahman*, and seek refuge in this knowledge. Realizing that we ourselves are a manifestation of *Brahman* (*Tat twam asi* – "You are That") leads to the ultimate knowledge of Reality. The Absolute or God, complete and without desires, creates this wondrous world to share its inherent bliss and perfection.[29]

bhogārthaṁ sṛṣṭirityanye krīḍārthamiti cāpare
devasyaiṣa svābhāvo'yamāptakāmasya kā spṛhā

Some hold that creation exists for the Creator's pleasure, or as a respite to alleviate the painful dream of annihilation and solitude. However, creation unfolds according to the nature of God, devoid of any special purpose. What motive could there be for the Divine, whose desires are eternally fulfilled?
Mandukya Karika 1.9

In the sacrificial act of creation, the soul is bound by the triple bond of mind, nerves, and body. The yoga practitioner seeks liberation from these bonds, awakening the power of will to uplift their suppressed divinity and unleash inner psychological forces. This process elevates knowledge and will to a plane where truth is revealed. In Vedic symbolism, the horse represents knowledge as power, the dynamic force of vitality, while its counterpart, the cow, symbolizes consciousness as knowledge. The will can purify and elevate instincts and desires through the power of truth. The journey begins on the physical plane, ascending through the expansive life-force to the purified mind, symbolized by the sky. This ascent leads to the source of mental light, infinite consciousness. The lower world receives nourishment from the descent of the higher, creating a harmony between mental and physical consciousness.

The ancient sages sought wealth from the gods, symbolizing the richness of an enlightened mind and the abundance of life energy (represented by the cow and horse). This wealth is a fusion of light and energy, consciousness and power, embodying the dual aspects of action in Vedic and Vedantic thought. The will, imbued with knowledge, ascends from earth to sky, while the pure mind, filled with power, descends from sky to earth. This pure mind possesses the potential to eradicate ignorance and division. Through the descending intuition, it unveils the hidden light within us, bringing forth the Sun of Truth from its concealment.[30]

Although it may seem distant, reality can be experienced directly, whether through ancient symbols or modern philosophical language. To achieve this, we need to reverse our usual direction of thinking, which typically flows from higher consciousness downwards, focusing outwardly on the physical world. This mode of thinking constructs concepts to describe the external world, but to truly understand reality, we must move from reality to these concepts, not the reverse. This entails conveying experiences from higher consciousness, recognizing that all aspects of this spectrum, including both matter and soul, are realities in their own right, with no inherent hierarchy, as both are manifestations of an inherent unity.

As Bergson notes, reality comprises two complementary, interrelated parts: the material plane, which is external, spatially extended, discontinuous, quantitative, and divisible; and the spirit/soul plane, which is internal, extended in duration, produces qualitative changes, and is characterized by overlapping, indivisible states. These two planes highlight different aspects of existence, each requiring a different approach for understanding.

Since reality is composed of various planes, each with its distinct nature, the tools we use for investigation must be capable of comprehending and capturing the essence of these diverse realms. To truly grasp the multifaceted nature of reality, we need methodologies that are versatile and comprehensive enough to explore and understand each of these unique planes. The intellect, while striving to comprehend reality, is limited in its ability to grasp the novel and unique aspects of each moment. It tends to objectify and alter its subject, focusing on formal appearances and drawing conclusions without grasping the living, dynamic nature of reality. In contrast, intuition delves deeper than surface appearances. It enters into its object and reaches identity with it, establishing a relationship, empathizing, and thus merging with its essence. Intuition transcends the binary of intellect and instinct by directly experiencing and understanding reality, using analysis as a tool but not confined by its limitations.[31]

Let's now consider why understanding the interplay of consciousness and matter is important for us, identifying both opportunities and obstacles – material or intellectual – and exploring our potential for growth through them. Bergson, in his meditations on consciousness, discovered a

freedom within that was distinct from the material world and the realm of intellect. As previously mentioned: "Things have happened just as though an immense current of consciousness, interpenetrated with potentialities of every kind, had traversed matter, that it is necessity itself, to draw it towards organization and make it an instrument of freedom. But consciousness has had a narrow escape from being itself ensnared. Matter, enfolding it, bends it to its own automatism, lulls it to sleep in its own unconsciousness."[32]

Consciousness risks being ensnared by matter's automatism, leading to a predominance of unconscious, automatic behaviours. In lower consciousness, individuals often lack choice, following predetermined patterns. However, with the emergence of sentience comes choice, though initially overshadowed by the imperative of survival. In humans, this binding chain is broken, allowing actions that defy mere automatism. "Freedom, which finds itself, whilst necessity battles with itself, brings back matter to the condition of being a mere instrument."[33]

The integration of matter with the real self, suggests that the findings of metaphysics and science should be aligned, as both delve into aspects of the same reality. Bergson saw no difference in value between these disciplines. Although they differ in subject matter and methodology, they could become complementary, sharing insights at the intersection of matter and soul. He posited that a new metaphysics should operate on the ground of experience, aiming for increasing probability that eventually equates to certainty. The traditional approach to metaphysics, while rooted in facts, operates largely in the realm of the hypothetical. It attempts to define concepts that can only be approximated, requiring us to accept these definitions as definitive for its conclusions to hold validity. Consequently, its results, while appearing certain, actually reside more in the realm of possibility than absolute truth. In contrast, the contemporary approach to metaphysics emphasizes pure and continually increasing probability. It eschews assumptions in favor of an ongoing exploration of facts and experiences. Although this approach is inherently incomplete, it maintains a stronger connection to reality, grounding its explorations firmly in the observable and experiential world.[34]

2. The Relationship of Physical Existence with Other Planes

One-pointed consciousness and freedom – The system of planes of consciousness – The functioning of the physical body, the life-force and the pure mind

Consciousness is omnipresent, constantly endeavouring to manifest in increasingly perfect forms. Yet, in our daily lives, we find that our everyday consciousness is capable of grasping and expressing

only a fraction of reality, predominantly fixated on the material or physical aspects. Bergson sheds light on this limitation, stating: "In the absolute we live and move and exist. The knowledge we possess of it is undoubtedly incomplete, but it is not external or relative. [...] And, since matter is determined by intelligence – as there is an obvious correlation between them – one cannot exist without the other coming into being. The same process simultaneously carved out both matter and reason from that which encompassed both. This is the reality to which we increasingly return by transcending pure reason."[35]

He suggests that by progressively developing both science and philosophy, we approach a better understanding of reality and its living unity. This endeavour to transcend pure intelligence brings us closer to the original, expansive reality from which reason emerged and which is also the source of matter. The critical question then arises: How can we, while living in this world, transcend the confines of reason to experience this deeper reality? Bergson implies that this transcendence is a gradual process, requiring a shift in our approach to knowledge.

When we are fully present in our own lives, we can feel the essence of existence. This presence can be intensified by turning away from the external world and withdrawing our senses, leading us into the realm of pure duration. Often mistaken as merely a perception of time, duration is, in fact, a continuous flow of consciousness, an undivided continuum of the real self that incorporates the entirety of existence. In this state, the entire weight of the past influences the present, creating and enriching what already exists. This concentrated, undivided consciousness encompasses the complete consciousness of the past, and thereby also the present and the future it creates. As we expand our sense of presence and flowing awareness, we advance in understanding by immersing ourselves in duration. This process has varying degrees and levels, reflecting how deep we settle into our inner reality.

Concentration, or the one-pointedness of the mind, grants us freedom from automatic responses and enables independent action. However, this is not the pinnacle of self-control or ultimate freedom. When we deepen our sense of duration, life transcends mere reason and begins to encompass it. The intellect, which can grasp past moments of duration, is embraced by consciousness, which is far more expansive, being an indivisible whole rather than a derivative. True freedom is found in immersing ourselves in duration, where external will relaxes and memory flows freely. We transition from material existence to a spiritual or psychic existence not by focusing outwardly towards the world, but by turning inwardly, seeking the source rather than the manifestations that flow from it.

"The more we succeed in making ourselves conscious of our progress in pure duration, the more we feel the different parts of our being enter into each other, and our whole personality concentrate

itself in a point, or rather a sharp edge, pressed against the future and cutting into it unceasingly. It is in this that life and action are free. But suppose we let ourselves go and, instead of acting, dream. At once the self is scattered; our past, which till then was gathered together into the indivisible impulsion it communicated to us, is broken up into a thousand recollections made external to one another. [...] The more we perceive, symbolically, parts in an indivisible whole, the more the number of the relations that the parts have between themselves necessarily increases, since the same undividedness of the real whole continues to hover over the growing multiplicity of the symbolic elements into which the scattering of the attention has decomposed it."[36]

Matter, or physical existence, is deeply interconnected with other planes that together comprise the world and human existence. This interrelation is evident in how these levels define each other, interact, and either facilitate or impede each other's development and functioning. The undivided reality creates ever-renewing order as it progresses in its manifestation. Science, in its exploration, is beginning to uncover the infinite changes behind the causes and effects, revealing a higher order that becomes also visible in the physical realm. When we act freely, we tap into the creative power inherent within us. However, the rigid structures of intellectual or mathematical order and determinism can easily disrupt creative action. As if this interruption induced by reason were to carve out matter from the creative evolution, breaking the flowing continuity. Consciousness is turned outward by reason. If the tension of consciousness, determined by the past and flowing outward through reason, ceases (the external focus), then with the cessation of the cause, the effect also reverses.

If we imagine the various planes that construct the world and human existence, we gain a clearer understanding of reason's role as it traverses from the real self to matter, and what its present reality entails. The intellect can turn both outward towards the external world and inward towards higher levels of consciousness. Bergson articulates this as the intellect looking towards its own principle, its origin, while also being drawn downwards towards matter.

"Our own consciousness is the consciousness of a certain living being, placed in a certain point of space; and though indeed moves in the same direction as its principle, it is continually drawn the opposite way, obliged, though it goes forward, to look behind. This retrospective vision is, as we have shown, the natural function of the intellect, and consequently of distinct consciousness. In order for our consciousness to coincide with something of its principle (the inherent, extended consciousness or life-force), it must detach itself from the '*already-made*' and attach itself to the '*being-made*'. It needs that, turning back on itself and twisting on itself, the faculty of *seeing* should be made to be one with the act of *willing* – a painful effort which we can make suddenly, doing violence to our nature, but cannot sustain more than a few moments."[37]

When we engage in free action (in duration), we become aware of the underlying forces, discerning causes, transformations, and consequences. However, this perception does not equate to experiencing the pure current of will that vitalizes matter; we perceive only its derivative. To fully comprehend the original movement, we must connect with the principle of life, which inherently includes the principle of matter. Intuition is capable of unveiling this reality, while the intellect can articulate and further elaborate upon it based on its observations and knowledge. The key difference between these two cognitive processes lies in intuition's ability to reconcile various perspectives, recognising that they share the same singular truth, whereas reason develops a concept in one direction and then must circle back to intuition for further development. As Bergson suggests, "the object of philosophy would be reached if this intuition could be sustained, generalized and, above all, assured of external points of reference in order not to go astray."[38]

The physical body is a crucial instrument for action but does not originate these actions. Consciousness, which thinks and is distinct from the brain as part of the physical body, utilizes and directs these tools for action and outcome. Matter is objective, divisible, and forms what consciousness communicates, while consciousness itself is subjective, creative, and capable of forming images and perceptions. This perception is infused with memories, as the past is inextricably linked with the present. Memory and perception arise together and are inseparable, as are the connections between matter and soul. The distinction lies in their nature, not in their strength or order of emergence. Understanding this helps to clarify the real relationship between body and soul, indicating that these are parallel, complementary processes.

The self, or subject, is capable of cognition due to its inherent consciousness and duration. It represents a constantly evolving synthesis, always augmenting the present with new impressions. This self is unpredictable and ever-growing, transcending a mere collection of psychic states. Actions that characterise the self, emanating from its core, and possessing self-awareness, can be considered free actions. These actions are not only expressive of the self but are also self-affirming. Duration contributes to this freedom by its very nature of being logically unknowable. It is not bound by causality and can evolve in any direction, transcending itself. Its essence cannot be preemptively known; it can only be revealed through experience.

In his work *Creative Evolution*, Bergson concludes that while we utilize only a small portion of the past in our cognitive processes, the entirety of it informs our desires, will, and actions. This indicates that we are the architects and masters of our own lives. The creation reflects back onto the creator, with conditions shaping the personality as we continually give form to ourselves. In essence, we enact what we are and, in doing so, constantly recreate ourselves. We are in a perpetual state of becoming, where our actions and our being are intertwined in a dynamic process of self-creation.[39]

According to ancient traditions consciousness is understood to be all-pervasive, with creation being an expression of the self. This understanding allows us to become aware of the complex system of worlds or planes of consciousness that exist both within the human being and the external universe. The *Vedas* articulate the seven principles of being, which encapsulate the essence of these different planes: matter, life-force, mind, truth, pure beatitude or happiness, consciousness, and existence. The first three are human principles, while the latter four are divine. These principles provide a framework for understanding the dual consciousness of soul (*Purusha*) and nature (*Prakriti*). It is at the juncture of these two groups that truth is found, with yoga serving as a gateway to divine existence. This pursuit of yoga leads to eternal bliss, transcending the temporary joys of the world.

The truth is metaphorically hidden in the heart's cave, a darkness from which the soul's light, akin to the Sun, must be liberated. Joy resides within the three human principles, but the outward directed senses often obscure the pure mind or intellect from recognising this truth. Initially, there is a lack of discriminating vision and knowledge necessary to illuminate consciousness and prepare nature for immortality. The essence of immortality lies in one's identification. If a person identifies with the body, they are bound to its fate. Conversely, by identifying with eternal consciousness, one can transcend the physical limitations, putting on and taking off the body like clothing, thereby partaking in the soul's immortality. The supramental (the light) and the subconscious (the shadow) interact through the extended mind. In this context, bliss (*ananda*) is revealed as the secret essence of the mental self, embodying the core of immortality.[40]

atrānātmanyahamiti matirbandha eṣo'sya puṃsaḥ
prāpto'jñānājjananamaraṇakleśasaṃpātahetuḥ
yenaivāyaṃ vapuridamasatsatyamityātmabuddhyā
puṣyatyukṣatyavati viṣayaistantubhiḥ kośakṛdvat
atasmiṃstadbuddhiḥ prabhavati vimūḍhasya tamasā
vivekābhāvādvai sphurati bhujage rajjudhiṣaṇā
tato'narthavrāto nipatati samādāturadhikaḥ
tato yo'sadgrāhaḥ sa hi bhavati bandhaḥ śṛṇu sakhe ...
tirobhūte svātmanyamalataratejovati pumān
anātmānaṃ mohādahamiti śarīraṃ kalayati
tataḥ kāmakrodhaprabhṛtibhiramuṃ bandhanaguṇaiḥ
paraṃ vikṣepākhyā rajasa uruśaktirvyathayati

Due to the human ignorance, the self misidentifies itself with what it is not – the transient physical body. This misidentification leads to a state of bondage, entrapping the individual in the cycle of birth and death. By considering this impermanent body as the true self, people tend to care for it excessively, indulging it with sensual pleasures that further entangle them, much like a silkworm bound by its own threads. This is the peril of living in ignorance, where one mistakes what is ephemeral for what is eternal and real. It is akin to seeing a rope and believing it to be a snake, a misapprehension that can lead to grave consequences. This lack of discernment, where the ephemeral is mistaken for the real, is what binds an individual to the (limited) world. [...] When one fails to experience the luminous nature of one's true Self, they fall into the trap of identifying with the body, which is the non-self. This misidentification is fuelled by the force of passion (*rajas*), known as projection, leading to intense suffering through the shackles of desire and anger. **Viveka Chudamani 137–38 & 140**

bhānuprabhāsaṃjanitābhrapaṅktiḥ bhānuṃ tirodhāya vijṛmbhate yathā
ātmoditāhaṃkṛtirātmatattvaṃ tathā tirodhāya vijṛmbhate svayam ...
bījaṃ saṃsṛtibhūmijasya tu tamo dehātmadhīraṅkuro
rāgaḥ pallavamambu karma tu vapuḥ skandhoo'savaḥ śākhikāḥ
agrāṇīndriyasaṃhatiśca viṣayāḥ puṣpāṇi duḥkhaṃ phalaṃ
nānākarmasamudbhavaṃ bahuvidhaṃ bhoktātra jīvaḥ khagaḥ

Like the layers of clouds created by the sun's rays that hide the sun itself, only to be visible in the sky, our selfness or personality, crafted by our true self, similarly veils the actual nature of our real self, presenting itself as the only entity. [...]. The tree of *samsara*, symbolizing the cycle of birth and death, has its roots in ignorance. Our identification with the physical body acts as the initial shoot, giving rise to the tree. Attachments are symbolized as its tender leaves, and our actions its sap. The physical body forms the trunk, while the life forces (*prana*) are the branches. The senses, akin to twigs, extend outwards, reaching towards the sense-objects, depicted as flowers. The varied sufferings that arise from our diverse actions are the fruits of this tree, each one a consequence of our deeds. Perched upon this tree is the individual soul or consciousness, observing and experiencing the cycle of *samsara*, yet distinct from the tree itself. **Viveka Chudamani 142 & 145**

The *Vedas* describe the supreme abode of God as the upper triple world, known as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or Being-Consciousness-Bliss. This realm symbolizes the bliss of the eternal self. Below this lies an intermediate plane, referred to as the Sun or the realm of Truth, which transcends the mind (often termed as the supramental plane, gnosis, or *vijnana*). On a more tangible level, the human

experience is depicted through the lower triple world, comprising the sky, intermediate air, and earth. These represent the principles of pure mind, vital force, and matter. These ascending levels of consciousness align with the aforementioned seven principles of existence. This framework helps us understand that the evolution and self-expression of eternal existence are embodied in nature itself, which depends on the lower, human planes for its ascent. This ascension manifests in three distinct stages: the physical or ordinary material life, life marked by mental activity and growth, and spiritual existence characterized by enduring spiritual bliss.

When creation unfolds, the mental and physical realms emerge from this spiritual existence. As humans endeavour and progress, illuminating these planes, spiritual existence evolves as a culmination of the physical and mental realms. Thus, the higher realms uplift and transform the lower, not by eliminating them, but by altering their function. While we have the option to focus on one specific form – be it physical, mental, or spiritual – we also possess the capacity to integrate these forms, creating a holistic, unified experience of existence.

The fundamental goal of the soul is to bring enlightenment to both the life-force and the mind. In this scheme, the body serves as the foundational mould of our existence. The life-force acts as a bridge, enabling the soul to express itself. While the evolving mind that is an extension of the soul, and pursuits perfection – of itself and other elements like the body and life – leads to a fuller realization of the soul. Yoga offers a pathway for rapid and profound transformation at the individual level, in contrast to nature's gradual progression across humanity as a whole. The widespread practice of yoga aligns with nature's ultimate aim, as it equips humanity for a spiritual existence. Through yoga, individuals can accelerate their personal evolution, contributing to the collective spiritual advancement of humanity.

- The life-force is defined by its persistence and tendency to self-replicate. Its primary instinct lies in self-preservation and self-multiplication, aiming for immortality. However, while individual forms are transient, the underlying idea of these forms is enduring, leading to reproduction as a means of material immortality. This life-force seems to move in a fixed cycle, continually revolving in a given pattern of existence.
- The pure mind represents change, self-expansion, and self-enhancement. It progresses from simpler forms of perfection to more complex ones, becoming more effective in its evolution as it develops. Inherently infinite and adaptable, the pure mind is capable of versatile transformations within its domain. Its movement is not merely circular but follows an upward, evolving spiral.

- The soul, or the real self, embodies self-existent perfection and immortality. It inherently encompasses the objectives of both the life-force and the mind. The soul's purpose in its manifested form is to achieve and actualize the eternal essence that is uniformly present and identical in all beings. This essence transcends the confines of the life-force and mind, imbuing existence with joy in both the worldly and transcendent realms.[41]

Human beings function at both individual and communal levels, necessitating a pursuit of unity not only within oneself – harmonizing with God and the world – but also in enriching the environment by sharing one's spiritual insights. In this manner, the aspirant strives for personal development, not driven solely by self-interest but without disregarding or sacrificing it for the sake of collective existence. This path to ascension is viable because what we perceive externally is also inherent within us. The material world represents just one facet of our experience; we are born of both the earth and the sky. As we progress on our evolutionary path, we awaken to deeper and loftier realms of existence. New worlds and possibilities unfold as our faculties develop, shaping us into reflections of a higher consciousness. This process of ascension is, in essence, a rebirth of the soul, continuously transforming us as we expand our understanding and being.

nartaka ātmā | raṅgo 'ntarātmā | prekṣakāṇīndriyāṇi | dhīvaśāt-sattva-siddhiḥ | siddhaḥ svatantra-bhāvaḥ | yathā tatra tathānyatra | bījāvadhānam | āsanasthaḥ sukhaṁ hrade nimajjati | svamātrā-nirmāṇam āpādayati | vidyā-avināśe janma-vināśaḥ

The individual who has realized their deepest spiritual essence, the *Atman*, becomes akin to a dancer on the world's stage. This stage is not external but a creation of the real self within. The senses act as mere spectators to the unfolding events on this stage. With mastery over perception, one can redirect outer consciousness towards the innermost Reality, thereby reaching the light of the true self. This mastery signifies complete independence and ultimate liberation. In this liberated state, the yogi has the ability to manifest this freedom both within their own body and in the external world. Within their mind, the yogi focuses attention, with unwavering devotion, on the centre of creative light, the consciousness that is the source of all universal manifestations. Rooted in the concentrated essence of *Atman*-consciousness, or *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, the yogi dwells in an eternal ocean of perfect knowledge and bliss. By realizing the creative energy, the yogi has the power to bring forth forms that reflect the extent of their consciousness. As long as this pure and innate wisdom is sustained, the cycle of reincarnation, the continuous process of birth and death, is transcended. **Shiva Sutras 3.9–18**

śarīra-vṛttir vratam | kathā japaḥ | dānam ātma-jñānam |
yo'vipastho jñāhetuś-ca | svaśakti pracayo'sya viśvam | sthiti-layau |
tat-pravṛttāvapyanirāśaḥ saṁvettṛ-bhāvāt

By maintaining their physical body as a vessel for the real self, a realized yogi achieves liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. In this state, they serve humanity in the tangible world through acts of compassion and mercy. Engaging in a dialogue about enlightenment with such a yogi becomes a sacred act, akin to a form of prayer (*japa*), resonating with the transcendent message of this divine human existence. The profound wisdom of the real self (*Atman*) is a treasure that the yogi generously shares. As a giver of spiritual knowledge, drawn from direct experience, the yogi becomes a guardian for those they guide, fostering their development based on the sincerity of their approach. Empowered by the divine force of the Supreme Self, the yogi possesses the extraordinary ability to manifest entire universes. This same power grants them the capacity to sustain or dissolve these manifestations at will. Despite the continual cycles of creation and destruction within the universe, the yogi's consciousness remains unshaken, firmly anchored in the unwavering truth of Absolute Reality. **Shiva Sutras 3.26–32**

3. The Working of Nature

The meaning of evolution and the ultimate purpose of existence –
The basis of material existence – Fulfilment

As Bergson describes it: "Evolution illustrates the direction of the original primordial current. The evolution of living beings shows what remains from the initial direction of the original current, and an impulse that moves counter to materiality. The creation of the world is an act of free will, and the life present in it shares this freedom. In vital activity we see, then, that which subsists of the direct (primordial) movement in the inverted movement, a reality which is making itself in a reality which is unmaking itself."[42] This suggests that when energy and will are present, they propel movement in their own direction, overcoming the inertia of matter. Conversely, when this energy dissipates or the will ceases, the movement also halts, becoming static or regressing.

Bergson observed that creation is an experience we internally undergo when we act freely – that is, when we are present, active, feeling, and thinking without reliance on habitual patterns or automatisms. Intuition reveals the Absolute or God as a continuum of uninterrupted life, action, and freedom, where nothing is preordained but is constantly in the process of happening. If we rely solely on the intellect to understand creation, it tends to present a dichotomy of a creator and created

entities, failing to grasp the dynamic nature of change and becoming. The intellect presents an event as something before which certain things do not exist and after which they have already come into existence. It tends to freeze events into static snapshots, failing to capture the fluidity and entirety of movement, even when these snapshots are in a sequence. Observing the world, one might conclude that automatic and predetermined evolution is a process where life deconstructs into matter. The unforeseeable forms that life has internally conceived extend in unpredictable movements, thereby creating themselves. This process is like a centre from which worlds are perpetually flowing outward, constantly evolving and taking shape.

"Reason cuts out things moment by moment from the continuous flow, and if we place them back into the flow, we get the picture of reality. In this way, creative action and the understanding of reality, which still organizes living forms, become much more comprehensible. [...] In reality, life is a movement, materiality is the inverse movement, and both of these two movements are simple: matter gives form to a world that is actually an undivided flux, and life – also undivided – running through matter cuts out living beings along its way. These two movements are opposite to each other, but the former continuously retains something from the latter."[43] We can perceive the inherent flow of existence if we reintegrate the elements that have been cut out of it, by withdrawing our will. In doing so, everything merges back into a singular movement. This original current simultaneously creates and dismantles itself, thereby revealing to us the essence of evolution.

The fundamental principle of yoga aligns with the universal functioning of nature. This nature is understood as the cosmic energy and activity of the Absolute or God within the entirety of existence. All manifestations are inspired by the consciousness of the infinite self. Nature's evolution is not linear or mechanical; it constantly surpasses itself, and even taking on setbacks or stagnations. It is marked by progress, bursts of emergence, and actualization.

In our experience, matter forms the foundational condition for all our energy and realization. The life-force is the means by which we exist in the material body, underpinning our mental and spiritual functions. Hence, nature has intricately developed and strengthened the life-force within the body, achieving a synergy between the activities and developments of these lower levels. This results in the gross physical body, composed of two layers: the material or food sheath (*annamaya-kosha*) and the nervous system or life-force sheath (*pranamaya-kosha*). Through this design, nature equips the human being with a suitable vessel for higher consciousness. It stabilizes material movements, transforming matter into a form that is both solid and durable, yet also flexible and changeable. This equilibrium between the passivity of matter and the activity of the life-force creates a conducive environment for the development of a mental instrument.

Our journey in the material world begins with our physical existence as the foundation. From there, we ascend into the realm of mental life, guiding the body towards higher aims and elevating it to a state of greater completeness. The culmination of this journey is the attainment of divine existence. This ultimate state is not only the goal of our physical and mental endeavours but it also descends into these realms to free them, unlocking their higher potentialities. Realizing this ultimate truth does not necessitate the destruction of the physical and mental aspects of our being. Instead, it involves their appropriate utilization and upliftment. Yoga is fulfilled through this harmonious integration, where the lower aspects are not discarded but elevated and aligned with their highest purpose.[44]

yaḥ sarvajñaḥ sarvavidyasyaiṣa mahimā bhuvi
divyebrahmapure hyeṣa vyomnyātmā pratiṣṭhitaḥ
manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīranetā pratiṣṭhito'nne hṛdayaṃ sannidhāya
tadvijñānena paripaśyanti dhīrā ānandarūpamamṛtaṃ yad vibhāti

The real self (*Atman*), omnipresent and all-encompassing, whose splendour reaches across the entire world, crafted the divine city of *Brahman* (the body) and manifested within it. This *Atman* reigns as the master of the mind and life force (*prana*). It is the mover of the body, although it appears to be governed by these elements. The *Atman* resides in every heart, transcending such limitations. It is through the wisdom of this Supreme Being that those who practice self-discipline can perceive its essence as bliss and immortality. **Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.7**

Nature is actively engaged in evolving mental existence, with the aim of making it universal in the world. Inherently, human beings are thinkers, mental beings endowed with the ability to govern life and the body. Initially, the mind is deeply intertwined with the physical being, accepting the body as the foundation of its activities and prioritizing its needs as the primary objective of existence. True existence begins to unfold when the intellectual mind detaches itself from the confines of the vital and physical realms. This liberation grants the mind genuine authority over these domains. However, it's important to recognize that the mind is not the pinnacle of evolution, nor the ultimate end goal. Rather, it functions as an inner instrument or sense (*antah-karana*). The foundational principle of philosophy has always pointed towards an existence that transcends the mental realm. This higher state of being can be accessed and realized through the practice of yoga, which facilitates the transcendence of the mind and the realization of a more profound plane of existence. Human beings are composed of several layers or planes, each representing different aspects of our existence:

- As mentioned earlier, the physical and vital being encompasses the gross physical body, which consists of the food sheath (*annamaya-kosha*) and the life-force sheath (*pranamaya-kosha*). These sheaths represent the tangible, material aspect of our existence and the vital energies that animate it.
- The mental being pertains to the subtle physical body, characterized by the mind's sheath or mental instrument (*manomaya-kosha*). This layer encapsulates the mental processes and functions, forming the nexus of our thoughts and cognitive abilities.
- The divine presence of the supramental being represents the causal body, encompassing the fourth and fifth sheaths (*vijnanamaya-kosha* and *anandamaya-kosha*). These sheaths are expressions of pure consciousness and bliss, symbolizing self-existent truth and joy. These higher psychological concepts represent the culmination of experiential fulfilment and perfection.

yadā viniyataṁ cittam ātmany evāvatiṣṭhate
nispṛhaḥ sarva-kāmebhyo yukta ity ucyate tadā
sukham ātyantikaṁ yat tad buddhi-grāhyam atīndriyam
vetti yatra na caivāyaṁ sthitaś calati tattvataḥ

For the aspirant committed to the path of yoga, achieving control over the mind is pivotal. When one attains a state of self-contentment, devoid of desires, one is considered to be firmly established in yoga. [...] In this state, one experiences supreme spiritual bliss, maintaining a heightened sense of intellectual discernment that transcends sensory experiences. Once firmly grounded in this state, one consistently aligns with the Truth, never deviating from this enlightened path. **Bhagavad Gita 6.18 & 21**

saṅkalpa-prabhavān kāmāṁs tyaktvā sarvān aśeṣataḥ
manasaivendriya-grāmaṁ viniyamya samantataḥ
śanaiḥ śanair uparamed buddhyā dhṛti-gṛhītayā
ātma-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcid api cintayet
yato yato niścalati manaś cañcalam asthiram
tatas tato niyamyaitad ātmany eva vaśaṁ nayet
praśānta-manasaṁ hy enaṁ yoginaṁ sukham uttamam
upaiti śānta-rajasaṁ brahma-bhūtam akalmaṣam

To fully embrace the yogic path, one must relinquish all desires rooted in self-interest, withdrawing the senses inward through the power of the mind alone, and then, with a steady and concentrated mind, gradually enter into *samadhi*, the profound state of meditative union with the real self. In this state, the mind resides solely in the real self, undistracted by external thoughts. Whenever the inherently restless mind strays toward external objects, it should be promptly reined in, aligning it back under the dominion of the real self. A yogi who achieves this inner tranquillity experiences the highest form of happiness. Freed from passions, purified from karmic repercussions and dualities, one reaches the ultimate state of unity with the Absolute, the *Brahman*. **Bhagavad Gita 6.24–27**

sarva-bhūta-stham ātmānaṁ sarva-bhūtāni cātmani
īkṣate yoga-yuktātmā sarvatra sama-darśanaḥ
yo māṁ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati
tasyāhaṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati
sarva-bhūta-sthitaṁ yo māṁ bhajaty ekatvam āsthitaḥ
sarvathā vartamāno 'pi sa yogī mayi vartate
ātmaupamyena sarvatra samaṁ paśyati yo 'rjuna
sukhaṁ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṁ sa yogī paramo mataḥ

The yogi who has achieved this union with the real self (*Atman*) perceives a universal identity, recognizing the real self in all beings and seeing all beings as residing within the real self. The yogi who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me is never lost to Me, and I am never lost to him. By perceiving the divine essence dwelling in all beings, and achieving a state of oneness, the yogi worships Me in all forms, remaining perpetually united with Me in every circumstance. The most exemplary yogi is the one who, recognizing the self in all, sees all living beings as equal, regardless of their happiness or suffering. **Bhagavad Gita 6.29–32**

In the realm of yoga, there exists a harmonious interplay among the highest faculties – revelation, inspiration, and intuition – operating on a plane that transcends even intuition. These faculties enable direct perception of truth, allowing one to not only see and live in truth but also express it authentically. These states of subjective existence dwell within us at a supramental level, making them attainable goals in our continuous spiritual practice.

- Mental activity, when separated from the essence of truth, becomes merely a fragment, an incomplete and distorted projection of the whole truth.

- Perceptions and emotional experiences are fragments of a larger state of bliss. They capture only portions of the fuller, more profound joy inherent in existence.
- The expressions of our vital powers and actions are merely partial manifestations of the inherent will and power that animate us. They represent only aspects of a more expansive potential.
- The physical being too, is an imperfect form of the essence of bliss and consciousness. It embodies a limited expression of these higher states.

Each aspect of our being – the physical, vital, and mental – possesses the potential to undergo a divine transformation. This profound change is made possible because the real self, the essence of divinity, is inherent within all beings. The higher powers are continuously at work, utilizing, refining, and perfecting the imperfections inherent in matter, life-force, and mind. Ultimate knowledge involves recognising and embracing God both within the universe and beyond it. Upon discovering this divine presence, we are empowered to return to the world with a renewed vision, elevating it and asserting our spiritual influence over it. Therefore, it is a partial truth to regard only mental existence as valuable or to view solely spiritual existence as the ultimate goal, perceiving the mind as an impediment. Despite the current limitations of the mind, it is crucial to acknowledge its divine origin, purpose, and potential. The mind, along with the other aspects of our being, is a vital component in our journey towards spiritual realization and fulfilment.

II. Life Impulse, the Driving Force Behind the Evolution of the World

1. How Creative Force Works

The expression of consciousness – The universal energy or creative force – The creation of the self by the self – The vital force as the sustainer of life – The vital force in the human being: vital and nervous functions – The importance of the centres of consciousness

In the preceding chapters, we have touched upon the concept of *élan vital*, a cornerstone in Henri Bergson's philosophy. Now, we delve deeper into its essence and nature, offering insights into the very source of existence, the true nature of dynamic and effective time, and the driving force and direction of the world's development, along with its meaning and purpose. Bergson chose the term "impulse" to encapsulate the essence of life, finding it an apt descriptor. The life impulse acts as the catalyst for the world's development and the emergence of life's diversity. Creative energy is conscious in nature, a manifestation of an inner impulse, in other words, it is the continuously unfolding, evolving, and creative energy of the real self. This is how the expression and manifestation of consciousness in the world is realized, and evolution is, in fact, the growth and development of consciousness.[45] All life is part of this continuous impulse, contributing to and driving the entire living world towards increasingly advanced stages of development. This impulse is intrinsically linked to the concept of duration (*durée*), signifying a flow in eternal, indivisible time, or in other words, duration is the continuity of existence. When viewed as a force manifesting diversity, duration can also be synonymous with vitality.[46] Thus, vitality can be understood as a process of perpetual change and creation, the creative evolution that underpins all life.

"The evolution of life, from its early beginnings to humanity, reveals to us a stream of consciousness that flows against matter and is meant to carve out a hidden path for itself. This consciousness temporarily attempts in every direction, progressing more or less forward, most often hitting rocks and stalling, and yet it still manages to find its way in at least one direction and rise to the light. This direction is the path of evolution that eventually led to humans."[47] Building on Bergson's philosophy, we can assert that life, or the vital force, and consciousness are fundamentally intertwined. He conceptualizes life as a stream of consciousness, suggesting that life and consciousness are mutually conditional.

At the heart of life lies consciousness itself. This consciousness, embodying the vital impulse and the inherent need to create, manifests only in environments conducive to creation. It remains

dormant in situations bound to automatism but springs to life the moment choices become possible.[48] This implies that when our actions are habitual and routine, our presence and the potential for novelty diminish. Everything continues in the same pattern, stifling creativity. In contrast, breaking free from habitual patterns, being present, looking inward – these actions ignite new ideas, inspiration, and the possibility of conscious choices through extended awareness.

The vital impulse is essentially an expression of consciousness. Consciousness grows and reveals itself through the life impulse, while the life impulse is stimulated and evolves due to the drive of the primordial conscious self. This impulse also embodies the dual necessity of expanding in number and complexity – multiplying in space and increasing in intricacy over time.[49] As previously discussed regarding nature, this process is inherent to its operation: nature creates and sustains forms that can express the inherent self. Being infinite, nature abounds in endless variations and potentials, constantly striving to elevate its creations to ever higher levels, ultimately guiding them back to the source or self from which they originated.

In the functioning of life, two critical moments stand out: first, life engages with the inertia of matter, almost as if solidifying into matter itself. Then, it activates and evolves this matter, setting in motion a transformative process. "...For life proceeds by insinuating, and the force which drew matter away from pure mechanism could not have taken hold of matter had it not first itself adopted that mechanism. [...] In other words, life must have installed itself in a matter which had already acquired some of the characters of life without the work of life."[50] This force, as Bergson describes, "seeks to free itself from trammels and also to surpass itself". In its endeavour, it initially appears to sacrifice itself when immersed in matter. Yet, it is the unique capacity of consciousness to draw out more than what it inherently contains, thereby continuously enriching its own existence. Bergson poetically states that consciousness has the ability "...to give first all it has and then something more than it has."[51] The overarching aim of consciousness, and consequently of life, is incessant growth and self-progression. This power actively operates within the human being, too.

However, the human being is not the final destination of this evolutionary journey but rather a significant milestone. And also more than just a step in the progress, it is in the human being that the life impulse first attains freedom through reason. This does not imply that nature is obliged to create a form superior to the human being for reflecting consciousness. Instead, it suggests that human capacity should be expanded, requiring extraordinary effort, to embody and manifest more of consciousness. This concept is exemplified by the mystics explored by Bergson in the *Two Sources*, who attained union with God in their human form and managed to unveil it. The faculties we currently deem supernatural are, in fact, inherent components of nature, thus aligning with the supramental rather than the supernatural. As mental beings, our next evolutionary leap involves

transcending our current state to access the supramental plane, a realm characterized by intuition and intuitive knowledge and consciousness.

Expanding on Bergson's philosophy, life is described as a "new and original emergence", inherently characterized by freedom. It embodies a process of continuous creation and renewal that transcends mere intellectualization, and instead must be deeply felt and experienced.[52] This vitality of life is characterized by duration, which is real and experienced time. It represents a flowing present, marked by dynamic continuity and constant development, an ongoing journey of eternal invention and ceaseless renewal that defies repetition and the constraints of matter. This perspective is logical when we consider that each moment in time adds something new to the sum of all preceding moments, effectively altering the entirety of the past. As a result, each present moment is unique, never a mere repetition of what has come before. Reality in each moment manifests itself uniquely, offering insights and solutions that can only be fully comprehended by the individual who has lived through that moment and has been shaped by the cumulative experiences of previous presents.

In this understanding of existence, consciousness is omnipresent, serving as an inherent and fundamental reality that moves in tandem with the life current in an upward flow. In contrast, matter represents a downward movement, opposite to that of consciousness. Consequently, every aspect of manifested reality participates in this dual process of ascending and descending movement. The essence of reality is defined by consciousness, freedom, creativity, and duration. Matter, however, imposes limitations and induces a dormant state in this otherwise dynamic reality.[53] In the human experience, the body, which is essentially a collection of habits, temporarily obscures consciousness, or the real self, even though it is present in all things. The body, along with the life-force and the mind – intended as instruments to serve and express the real self in the world – often operate in their own cycles, following self-created or habitual patterns, reacting to stimuli, and pursuing their desires. These instruments may sometimes obstruct or even dominate each other in pursuit of their self-serving goals.

Ideally, as instruments, they should operate in a manner where the higher order influences the lower, without any hierarchical distinction between them, acknowledging the equal importance of each. The body is essential for expression in the physical world, vitality is necessary for action, and the mental faculties enable thinking, will, and emotion. The higher instruments, being closer to the source, allow for a more advanced and expansive consciousness to descend through them. When consciousness illuminates and flows through these means, harmonious functioning is achieved. Each instrument can then operate optimally within its realm, expressing its essence and the real self effectively.

indriyāṇi mano buddhir asyādhiṣṭhānam ucyate
etair vimohayaty eṣa jñānam āvṛtya dehinam
tasmāt tvam indriyāṇy ādau niyamya bharatarṣabha
pāpmānaṁ prajahi hy enaṁ jñāna-vijñāna-nāśanam
indriyāṇi parāṇy āhur indriyebhyaḥ paraṁ manaḥ
manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ
evaṁ buddheḥ paraṁ buddhvā saṁstabhyātmānam ātmanā
jahi śatruṁ mahā-bāho kāma-rūpaṁ durāsadam

The senses, mind, and intellect are often regarded as the abodes of desire, which obscure the true knowledge of the embodied soul. To uncover this knowledge, regulate the senses and curb desire, the root of misperception. This control helps to eliminate the obstructions to the wisdom of knowledge and spiritual experience. It is understood that while the senses are powerful, surpassing mere matter, the mind holds greater power than the senses, and the intellect is even more powerful than the mind. Yet, above all these is the real self (*Atman*), the most potent force. By awakening to the real self, which lies beyond the intellect, and by mastering the lower mind through this higher self, one can conquer the formidable enemy known as desire. **Bhagavad Gita 3.40–43**

The Vedic tradition also acknowledges the all-encompassing nature of the real self. To aid yoga practitioners in understanding existence, it defines multiple planes and worlds. While these are distinct, they are all manifestations of the singular Reality, each interconnected and mutually influential, with their own unique functions and tendencies. When all elements align and consciousness expands, this state is referred to as freedom, enlightenment, or liberation, known variously as *moksha*, *mukti*, *samadhi*, and so on. The primordial, central self is not overshadowed or distorted by these lower planes. Instead, the lower planes utilize the power and consciousness emanating from this higher centre, not necessarily to express it, but often to act upon their own impulses, sometimes even at the expense of one another. The different planes of being thus create an intricate, interconnected movement, where the higher influences the lower, and the lower reflects aspects of the higher. For instance, this dynamic can manifest as an unusually clear thought or feeling amidst surrounding confusion. Experiences on the lower planes are typically more limited, characterized by a sense of separation from the higher planes or a shift in aspirations. In contrast, the higher urges and aspirations originate from and descend through the higher planes. For instance, the intellect can direct and focus the life-force and the body in such a way that they accomplish new challenges.

As the higher plane manifests within the lower, it imbues it with the essence of existence, a process known as fulfilment. This heightened state of awareness is accessible in our present life and within our current physical form. The practice of yoga emphasizes the awareness of these various planes of being because they hold the key to navigating from our current state to our desired spiritual destination. The ultimate aim is to forge a connection with the centre of being, reaching the plane where such a connection becomes feasible. To achieve this, we need to transcend our existing nature and learned patterns, thereby enabling our lives to embrace a more extended consciousness. This transition is feasible because these planes are not rigidly separated but rather interdependent, allowing us to traverse them by understanding the threads that bind them.

Bergson recognized that living beings are the products of two opposing movements, encompassing both matter and life simultaneously. As previously discussed, these movements are in opposition: life, ever-flowing and progressing, must "freeze" to create the various life forms. The life impulse represents a unified, continuous flow, but upon encountering matter, it fragments and solidifies, diversifying into a multitude of living and non-living entities. Thus, the life impulse embodies unity within diversity, forming the basis for individual uniqueness – a separate unity that reflects the entirety.[54] It can also be viewed as an organic unity, where each member or element of this unity holds, encompasses, and interrelates with the whole.

The real self, seemingly constrained by the inertness of matter, is actually liberated through the emergence of movement. The presence of numerous choices for a living organism indicates a higher level of consciousness, signifying an unobstructed flow of the life impulse. Consciousness, serving as a facilitator of free choice, evolved to a certain degree in animals before humans. Even plants possess a form of consciousness, granting them a degree of free movement, albeit in a more concealed manner. This inner, latent consciousness manifests as instinct, which aligns with the flow of life, in contrast to reason that aligns with the movement of matter. This concept sheds light on human inspiration, which is essentially a form of instinct retained in humans that enables them to perceive, comprehend, and follow life. However, a key distinction exists between instinct and inspiration: inspiration functions on the mental plane, while instinct operates on the vital plane.[55] This is not contradictory but indicative of the diverse expressions of an inherent consciousness across different planes. In the vital plane, it appears as instinct, whereas on the mental plane, it manifests as inspiration and intuition.

While plants and animals are guided by life's movements through instinct, humans engage with these movements through conscious sympathy, identification, and resulting intuition. In humans, instinctual movements are significantly altered by the workings of the mind and senses. The primary difference between animal and human consciousness is that in animals, consciousness remains largely confined, whereas in humans, it has the potential to expand. The vital energy in humans,

after extensive struggle, eventually triumphs over matter. This victory paves the way for us to transcend ourselves, offering a genuine opportunity to achieve freedom. Yoga emphasizes this point, highlighting the inherent consciousness that assumes different forms across various planes, leading to the realization of our expansive potential.[56]

In the Vedic perspective, higher consciousness cascades downward, with the principles of existence manifesting progressively down to the level of matter. Earth is seen as the stage for this evolutionary process, where these principles of being manifest sequentially within earthly consciousness. In the initial stages of creation, matter was organized to form the physical plane. This foundational layer of existence was then imbued with life-force, which endowed it with form, structure, and functionality. This vital infusion marked the emergence of the vital plane, leading to the development of the plant and animal kingdoms. Subsequently, the mind emerges, leading to the creation of human beings and the mental plane. However, this is not the culmination of the process. The descent continues to the plane of wisdom (gnosis) or supramental consciousness above the mind, paving the way for the development of the supramental human being. It's important to note that the vital plane mentioned here does not encompass the full scope of Bergson's concept of the life-force. While the life impulse becomes active on the vital plane, it also transcends it. The life impulse is a totality of conscious force in life, a universal energy and urge that expresses itself as life-force on the vital plane.

The supramental plane encompasses the lower planes of mind, life-force, and matter. The mind tends to perceive not the transitions or gradations between different points on a scale, but rather distinct, radically different, and seemingly incompatible elements, often viewing one as real and the other as unreal. However, the two extremes of this scale are not incompatible or opposed. The lower planes can fully unfold only within the context of the higher planes, achieving true fulfilment by transforming into these higher planes, supported and extended by them. Each lower principle, in its individual capacity, has a narrower scope and perfection. Yet, in synergy with the others, each is capable of reflecting the highest plane, thereby expressing its original source – the joy of the eternal self (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*), which embodies the upper members of the seven principles of existence.

Nature, propelled by the influence of the real self, evolves to develop forms capable of expressing and manifesting the real self across all planes. This evolution is driven by an inherent impulse, the fundamental source of all creation. The evolutionary journey begins with unconscious matter, progresses to the development of the unconscious (instinctive) life-force, and then to conscious life-force. Subsequently, the conscious mind emerges, initially manifesting in animals and reaching its full expression in the conscious and thinking human being. The goal of this process is the soul's ascent to the supreme reality, while the descent of the supreme into the world and its realization therein signifies the divine intent behind creation. Thus, the material plane concedes to the vital plane's influence in

unfolding the life-force and to the mental plane's pressure in the development of the mind. Similarly, while the mind initially exists as a latent mental plane, it eventually rises above the vital. In a parallel manner, the consciousness above the mind starts as a hidden presence, only manifesting in a few individuals. Over time, however, this higher consciousness expands, gradually shaping the lower planes to its own image.[57]

How do we perceive the inherent stream of consciousness, the life impulse, which, as a conscious force, embodies the essence of freedom? Philosophy and science predominantly advance through the intellect, which ultimately encounters its own limitations as it nears the threshold of supramental consciousness, entering the realm of metaphysics. However, we are also equipped with intuition and inspiration, powerful tools that can align with the direction of life within us. Our ability to perceive life and the world stems from our intrinsic connection to them. Through processes of identification and intuition, we can gain a deep understanding of life and the world. When one directs oneself towards this goal, both animate and inanimate entities, including one's inner self, become comprehensible. Conscious identification, or intuition, is the key to knowing life, the world, and oneself. It is this shared conscious centre that enables such profound understanding. As Bergson suggests, intuition is a form of mental union that allows us to delve into the core of an object, to unite with its unique and inexpressible aspects. The knowledge gained through this process offers an intimate, organic understanding of creative evolution, life, and the world. This vitality represents the unfolding of the original flow of being, perceived from a human standpoint as free action. Freedom, in this context, is self-determination, the expression of the life impulse.[58]

Initially, humans tend to identify with the gross physical body, considering it as the primary vehicle whose existence and health are of utmost importance. Yet, as the mind evolves and consciousness expands, this identification can be transcended. We move to the next plane of existence, the plane of *prana* or life-force, and become attuned to it. Since *prana*, assimilated through breathing, supports the functions of the action and sensory senses, it is on this plane that the life-force is perceived as the foundational basis of existence.

sa hovāca prāṇo'smi prajñātmā taṁ māmāyuramṛtamityupāsvāyuh prāṇaḥ prāṇo vā āyuḥ prāṇa evāca-amṛtaṁ yāvaddhyasmiñcharīre prāṇo vasati tāvadāyuḥ prāṇena hyevāmuṣmiṁlloke'mṛtatvamāpnoti prajñayāsatyasaṇkalpaṁ sa yo mamāyuramṛtamityupāste sarvamāyurasmiṁlloka eti āpnotyamṛtatvamakṣitiṁ svarge loke taddhaika āhurekabhūyaṁ vai prāṇā gacchantīti na hi kaścana śaknuyātsakṛdvācā nāma prajñāpayituṁ cakṣuṣā rūpaṁ śrotreṇa śabdaṁ manasā dhyānamityekabhūyaṁ vai prāṇa ekaikametāni sarvāṇyeva prajñāpayanti vācaṁ vadatī sarve prāṇā anuvadanti cakṣuḥ paśyatsarve prāṇā anupaśyanti śrotraṁ śṛṇvatsarve

prāṇā anuśṛṇvanti mano dhyāyatsarve prāṇā anudhyāyanti prāṇaṁ prāṇantaṁ sarve prāṇā anuprānaṇtīty evamuhaivaitaditi hendra uvācāstītyeva prāṇānāṁ niḥśreyasādānamiti

Indra (the representative of pure, extended mind) declares, "I am the *prana*, the life force. Meditate on me as the conscious self (*Prajna-atman*), as life (*ayuh*), as immortality (*amrita*). Life is identical with *prana*, and *prana* is identical with life. Immortality is identical with *prana*, and *prana* is identical with immortality. As long as *prana* resides in the body, life persists. Through *prana*, one achieves immortality in other realms, and through knowledge, one gains true understanding. Meditating on me as life and immortality leads to a perfect life in this world and eternal existence in the hereafter."

Pratardana said, " According to some views, the unification of *pranas* is crucial for the holistic functioning of our senses and cognitive faculties (otherwise no one could say, see, hear, or think anything). When the *pranas* merge, they facilitate the perception of all senses sequentially. In this unified state, each sense's activity is reflected across the other *pranas*: As the speech articulates, the other *pranas* participate in this expression; as the eyes observe, the other *pranas* share in this vision; as the ears listen, the other *pranas* resonate with the sounds; as the mind engages in thought, the other *pranas* align with this contemplation; and as the primary *prana* sustains breathing, the other *pranas* harmonize with this vital rhythm."

Indra replied, "That is the truth about *pranas*, which leads to liberation." **Kaushitaki Brahmana Upanishad 3.2**

The life impulse, as previously mentioned, follows an inherent stream of consciousness. Initially, it progresses as a single, undivided stream propelled by its original impulse. However, during its journey, it occasionally encounters what seem like temporary and apparent stops. These halts are temporary because they only last until the emergence of the next developmental phase, giving the false idea of stagnation. They are apparent in that the continuity of the life impulse is never truly interrupted. It resembles an underground stream, continuously flowing but only becoming visible when it surfaces. These pauses signify the emergence of various species and entities across different planes of existence. There are two primary factors behind these pauses: one is the resistance life encounters from matter, which is essentially condensed and congealed energy; the other is the inherent impetus within life itself, which manifests in various forms and tendencies. Life subtly triumphs over this resistance by becoming nearly imperceptible. According to Bergson, the phenomena in the most basic forms of life are ambiguous, neither wholly physical and chemical nor entirely vital.

To achieve this, life had to conform to the habits, the immobility, the rigidity of gross physical matter, eventually endowing it with the capacity for movement. In essence, life had to temporarily become matter to permeate and animate it. Although the earliest forms of life were exceedingly simple, the movement of life incessantly generated new forms. By examining this evolutionary process and reconnecting the diverse tendencies, we can trace back to the unified principle of motion from which they all originate. Bergson emphasized that, viewed through this lens, evolution presents a picture quite distinct from mere adaptation to circumstances, as posited by mechanistic theories (where identical causes always produce identical effects), or the fulfilment of a preordained plan, as suggested by teleological or finalistic perspectives.

While adaptation to the environment is a critical component of development, it merely accounts for changes in the trajectory of evolution, not the impetus behind the evolutionary movement itself. As an example, he said, we could consider the analogy of a road winding towards a city, conforming to the contours of a hillside. The variations in terrain do not cause the road to exist, nor do they dictate its ultimate direction. They simply pose obstacles that the road navigates as it makes its way to the city. Similarly, in the development of life and the various conditions it traverses, the life impulse functions as a conscious force manifest in evolution. Various species utilize this force to adapt to their environments. However, as previously mentioned, the evolution of life is not just a sequence of adaptations to specific circumstances, nor is it the execution of a pre-established plan. If evolution were merely the realization of a predetermined design, the end goal and the final state of the process would have been known from the outset. Bergson describes creative evolution as a "striving without a definite goal," a force and intention permeating life, not aimed at achieving a preordained objective. Rather, it is a continuous endeavour, a striving that connects to future outcomes, weaving a pathway through the ever-evolving tapestry of life.[59]

The ancient Vedic sages discerned that the life-force is a universal force with multifaceted roles: it creates, replenishes, sustains, modifies, dissolves, and recreates. Serving as an instrument of consciousness, it forms a bridge between matter and mind. While operating within the confines of matter, the life-force, as well as the mind, is somewhat concealed. Being subordinate to the mind, the operation of the life-force is fragmented, limited, and largely unconscious. The initial moment of this limitation occurs when the individual soul perceives itself as a separate entity, thereby enclosing the universal in individual functioning and giving rise to a distinct force with constrained capabilities and mechanical actions. However, as consciousness expands, humans gain the potential to realize divine power, transcending their own limited world and its limited operations.

The inherent state of the self within us is characterized by indivisibility. This state is marked by a cessation of desire and an equanimous approach to all experiences, be they joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, success or failure. It involves seeing both the higher and the lower, friend and foe, the virtuous

and the vicious, with the same level of understanding. It is the recognition of the One in all beings and the perception of the manifold play or disguised evolution of the embodied Self in all things. This expansive, all-encompassing, and steady universality is a hallmark of the witnessing self that stands behind nature. In this state, energy can be channelled into any action, with Truth as the guiding force. The true nature of the vital being is serene, intense, and powerful. Such is the essence of consciousness that resides in the life-force, the Divine immersed in the vital force: calm yet vigorous, free from selfishness, and capable of all forms of action and achievement. This authentic life-force is a divine force, imbued with peace and bliss.

duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣu vigata-spṛhaḥ
vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ sthita-dhīr munir ucyate
yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehas tat tat prāpya śubhāśubham
nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā
yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ kūrmo 'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

A sage of sound mind is characterized by their resilience in the face of adversity. Unperturbed by anxiety amidst suffering, unaffected by the lure of pleasure, and free from the pulls of attraction, fear, and anger, such a person embodies true wisdom. This sage remains detached in all circumstances, whether experiencing fortune or misfortune, neither drawn by allure nor repelled by distaste, maintaining a steadfast contemplative mind. One who has mastered the art of withdrawing their senses from external temptations, much like a tortoise retracting its limbs into its shell, possesses firmly established knowledge. **Bhagavad Gita 2.56–58**

yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate

In the practice of yoga, it is essential to engage in your duties and actions with equanimity, relinquishing all attachments to the outcomes. Maintaining balance in both success and failure is the essence of yoga. **Bhagavad Gita 2.48**

jñeyaḥ sa nitya-sannyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati
nirdvandvo hi mahā-bāho sukhaṁ bandhāt pramucyate

It is crucial to understand that a person who acts without desire or aversion, liberated from the dualities of life, embraces a life of continuous renunciation. Such an individual lives in a state of contentment, enjoying complete independence and happiness. **Bhagavad Gita 5.3**

To transcend the confused and unconscious movements of nature, the life-force in us must undergo purification and transformation. This process is contingent upon three conditions:

- Currently, the life-force is driven by desire. To attain a divine life, this desire must be supplanted with a purer impulse.
- In its usual functioning, life is steered by the impulses of the life-force, with the mind serving as its aide. For the aspirant, guidance should come from the soul, with the mind and the life-force acting as its instruments.
- At present, the life-force caters to the satisfaction of the separate ego. To transform, the ego must be replaced by the self, redirecting the life-force towards the Divine, becoming its instrument.

Bergson identifies the unity of life in the impulse itself, the driving force that propels it consistently through time. Harmony in life is not a reward at the end of a journey, but an intrinsic attribute experienced throughout the journey itself ("it is not in front, but behind"). The unity, as an impulse, exists from the outset, rather than being a goal to be achieved. A predefined plan implies a final state of action, shaping and delimiting the future. In contrast, life's evolution remains open-ended because life is synonymous with creation, moving forward ceaselessly by the unity and power of its initial movement. This movement underpins the diverse unity of the organized world, a unity of a higher order than what human reason can conceive. Reason is merely one manifestation of this unity. However, reason remains our most potent instrument. Through it, we can access reality beyond the mind, harness the lower means, and transform the entirety of nature – encompassing the body, life-force, and mind. The untrained and outward-focused intellect may not fully utilize its capacities, but their potential is significant.

The fundamental role of life, as conceived by Bergson, is to introduce indeterminacy into matter, countering the rigidity of determinacy or mechanical, habitual repetition. The evolutionary process, with its creation of unpredictable forms, leads to activities that are increasingly indeterminate and, therefore, increasingly free. Bergson observes that a broad view of the organic world reveals that the core mission of the life impulse has been to engender beings with escalating degrees of freedom. The development of the nervous system is crucial for the advanced expression of consciousness, with a

clear correlation existing between mobility (free movement) and consciousness. The more sophisticated the nervous system, the greater the variety and precision of movements a living being can select, and the more evident the accompanying consciousness becomes. However, it's vital to note that the nervous system is not a precondition for consciousness; rather, it is a basic and materially dispersed function that can be directed and enhanced.

Given the innate tendency of the life impulse to infuse freedom into matter, every entity in the organized world is in a perpetual state of self-transcendence. This drive stems from the fact that the real self, which life expresses, is inherently free. What then characterizes the dynamics of the life impulse's activity? Bergson points out that the omnipresent creative force in the world often encounters blockages, stalls, or reversals due to counteracting forces. In such scenarios, the life impulse becomes submerged in material forms, seemingly overwhelmed by the challenges and obstacles it faces. Life appears to be at the mercy of the materiality it assumed. Consider this process, which we all experience: "Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort (i.e. consciousness). It is constantly dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it. The word turns against the idea. The letter kills the spirit. And our most ardent enthusiasm, as soon as it is externalized into action, is so naturally congealed into the cold calculation of interest or vanity, the one takes so easily the shape of the other, that we might confuse them together, doubt our own sincerity, deny goodness and love, if we did not know that the dead retain the features of the living for a time."[60]

Even the most vibrant and spirited things can become rigid, losing their vitality through the very forms meant to express them. It falls upon us to keep these forms alive. The vital impulse exists independently of matter, yet the forms it creates to facilitate its progress can dull its own vibrancy. This is akin to how a person's free will can devolve into automatism or habitual action. The material forms shaped by life can overshadow the original impulse, just as our habits can submerge our creativity. However, the mind has the capacity to utilize these acquired habits to address new challenges and develop more advanced skills. Matter serves not only as a medium or obstacle to consciousness but also as a stimulus. Sri Aurobindo concurs, noting that the constant resistance offered by matter, as an obstacle, actually compels humans to exert greater effort, thereby facilitating the continuous development of consciousness through perpetual self-transcendence.

In yoga, enlightenment is also attainable through the regulation of *pranayama*, or breathing techniques, as breath serves as the connector between the gross physical body (*sthula*) and the subtler (*sukshma*) realms of the mind. Proper breath control is crucial in mastering the mind, but its influence extends beyond the physical and mental domains, serving as a potent tool for accessing higher states of consciousness. The goal of breath control is to redirect the flow of air, achieving a

balance between the downward and upward flows, and eventually halting this flow. Through this process of deepening meditation or contemplation, the intricate system of the life-force driven senses and human consciousness (*chitta*) can immerse itself in supreme consciousness.[61]

karmendriyaiḥ pañcabhirañcito'yaṃ prāṇo bhavetprāṇamayastu kośaḥ
yenātmavānannamayo'nupūrṇaḥ pravartate'sau sakalakriyāsu
naivātmāpi prāṇamayo vāyuvikāro gantāgantā vāyuvadantarbahireṣaḥ
yasmātkiṃcitkvāpi na vettīṣṭamaniṣṭaṃ svaṃ vānyaṃ vā kiṃcana nityaṃ paratantraḥ

Prana, along with the five active senses, constitutes the vital or life-force sheath (*pranamaya-kosha*), which permeates the material or food sheath (*annamaya-kosha*). It partakes in all actions, giving the impression of being alive. However, the vital sheath is not the real self. It is a transformation of the life-force (*vayu*), and like air, it is transient – entering and exiting the body, indifferent to its own or others' good or ill fortune, and eternally reliant on the real self. **Viveka Chudamani 165–66**

In us, the *pranamaya-kosha*, or the vital plane, harbours unconscious patterns of desire and fear that propel our aspirations and shape our lives. In the absence of higher aspirations, these impulses preoccupy the mind (*manas*) and the intellect (*buddhi*). When the mind resides within the realm of the life-force principle, it becomes immersed in this force, dominated by desires, activities, and passions. Predominantly, the energy of life overshadows the mental and physical principles, leading to a scenario where the physical aspect readily moulds its operations and forms in response to desires and ideas. Simultaneously, the life-force conditions and constrains the mind, which, in turn, aids in fulfilling its impulses.

jite manasi sarvaiva vijitā cendriyāvaliḥ
śīryate ca yathā tantau dagdhe mauktikamālikā
sarvatra sthitayā svaccharūpayā nirvikārayā
samayā sūkṣmayā nityaṃ cicchaktyā sākṣibhūtayā

The mind, when strengthened and governed by the intellect, keeps both the body's members and the heart's inner passions in check. Conversely, a mind that is unchecked and uncontrolled liberates these forces, letting them go astray. Such a mind is likened to a loose string of pearls, scattering its valuable elements. A disciplined mind, however, maintains clarity, unity, and calmness everywhere, ensuring balanced temperament and sound judgment through the witness state of its consciousness and the guidance of a clear conscience. **Vasishtha Yoga 3.110.25–26**

Life and matter, mind and body, are not two distinct substances but represent dual tendencies within the same substance, oscillating between ascent and descent. In an upward movement, the energy of matter assists life in achieving progressively higher, freer forms. Conversely, in a downward movement, life becomes solidified into matter as habit and materiality impose themselves. Thus, life is characterized by movement, mobility, and dynamism. However, progress is not linear but cyclical: "Like in a whirlwind, so do living beings swirl in the flow of life. Their permanence is relative, and sometimes they imitate stillness so well that we perceive them more as *things* than as *progressions*, forgetting that even the constancy of their form is but a sketch of their movements. Yet, sometimes, the invisible current that carries them materializes before our eyes in a fleeting phenomenon. Such sudden illuminations occur before us in certain forms of maternal love, which is so captivating in most animals, down to the plant's care for its seeds. "[62] It's crucial to note that in the aforementioned quote, Henri Bergson characterizes the nature of the unseen driving force as "love."

The diverse species identified by biological evolution represent various embodiments of the life-force within its dynamic movement. This evolutionary perspective gains a deeper meaning when we consider each species in relation to the life impulse from which it emerged, rather than solely focusing on the environmental conditions. The variety in species originates from the initial impulse with which life entered the world. In both plants and animals, movement initially was instinctive, meaning that the vital plane dominated, and the mental plane of consciousness – encompassing thought, will, and feeling – was present only in a latent form, subservient to instinct and nearly imperceptible. Since instinct is attuned to life, it executes its functions timely, effortlessly, and precisely. It possesses an inherent consciousness or inner knowledge, enabling it to operate in synchrony with life's organic unity.

The mental plane, however, is able to expand and become free only in humans. The mind's operation is bound for a long time by unconscious patterns and habitual automatisms, which also affect the instincts inherited from the animal kingdom. What functioned purely and precisely in animals becomes entangled in humans, who are under the influence of various mental patterns. The unconscious stores all experiences, fragments of desires, and pains. The mind readily accesses these imprints, associating them with current perceptions of events, objects, and people. As the mind gets purified, it develops the ability for higher thinking. Yet, the intellect initially focuses on examining external world objects until it redirects towards its source, discovering intuition. When intuition flows into the mental plane, it can reveal the flowing continuity of life, just as instinct does on the vital plane.

The primary distinction between instinct and intuition lies in their levels of self-awareness and control. Instinct operates without self-awareness, executing actions with a high degree of certainty but without the ability to control its own activities. Intuition, in contrast, is about reconnecting with reality and life by integrating into the intellect what instinct naturally possesses but cannot utilize consciously. The intellect, in its focus on matter, has forsaken the spontaneous, internal consciousness and the effortless, precise knowledge of instinct. In other words, for the sake of its own autonomous activity, it sacrificed its role as a mould and tool of intuition. The challenge, then, for the intellect is to reopen itself to this intuitive consciousness through a deliberate effort and self-transcendence. The advancement of the intellect must inherently involve the intellect itself. Reason is called to delve into the light from which it originates and in which it operates, transforming once more into a tool of intuition and consciousness. The validity and impact of this return to a more intuitive state will be affirmed through experiential evidence.[63]

Bergson observed that in automatic activities, consciousness is not conspicuously present. When one engages in a habitual action mechanically, the awareness of the action is overshadowed by the action itself. The action fits so seamlessly into the preconceived image of the action that no room is left for conscious awareness to manifest. However, consciousness must inherently be present, as evidenced by the fact that any interruption in the habitual action immediately brings consciousness to the forefront. This suggests that consciousness is always there, albeit in a latent state.

Bergson proposed that the intellect is oriented towards the conscious, while instinct gravitates towards the unconscious. The reasoning behind this lies in the nature of instinct, which is predominantly unconscious and offers little scope for choice, being driven by vital nature. Instinct can be seen as a form of collective consciousness that stores necessary information and "programs" for the survival and evolution of living beings, thereby nature can maintain and evolve the already created forms. In humans, it is through the mind that the pathway to consciousness and action based on free choice is forged. As mentioned earlier, the vital plane connects to life's organic unity through instinct, whereas on the rational plane, it is intuition that forms this connection. Bergson aptly noted, "An intelligent being bears within himself the means to transcend his own nature."[64] In essence, reason, our instrument of choice, when turned towards consciousness and transcending its own limitations, can reach the inner guide and essence of our mental nature – intuition. The flow of intuition is often impeded by the outward focus of reason, but by redirecting reason inward, we can tap into this intuitive understanding.

Examining reason and instinct from a knowledge-centric perspective, rather than focusing solely on action, reveals that knowledge and action are simply two manifestations of the same faculty. In essence, action is the outward expression of internal knowledge. Instinct represents the innate knowledge inherent in a living being. The distinction between instinct and reason can be succinctly

summarized as follows: "There are things that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek for them."[65] Instinct operates intuitively on the vital plane, but to achieve a deeper, "innate", organic knowledge of things, intuition must extend its influence to the mental plane. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to consider intuition functioning on the physical plane. Many can attest to countless instances showcasing the body's inherent intelligence, which operates independently of the mind's limiting emotions and thoughts. The body possesses the remarkable ability to adapt and heal itself, to detect and rectify abnormalities, and to communicate through symbolic language, revealing the nuances of consciousness, often in mere moments.

The disorganized, solid body stands as the primary focus for the outwardly turned intellect. This intellect is confined to perceiving pure immobility, reconstructing continuity from a series of static states. It dissects these states and then reassembles them into different systems. However, the sum of these immobile states does not equate to the dynamic process itself. "Reason is the outward-looking life, the life that is placed outside itself, accepting the principle of reason in order to then be able to control the external, unorganized world."[66] But when reason encounters organized living structures, it experiences a sense of bewilderment. It had aspired to master the seemingly disorganized external world, unaware that it was always under the influence of a conscious force. Consequently, it can be stated that whatever the intellect accomplishes, it invariably transforms the organized into the disorganized. It reduces processes to a series of static moments, as it cannot comprehend true continuity, real movement, mutual interpenetration, and fusion – the hallmarks of creative evolution, which is life itself – without reversing its natural orientation. The authentic continuity of life eludes an intellect that surrenders to its intrinsic movement, tendency, and limited functionality. As it isolates elements in space, it simultaneously fixes them in a static temporal framework. "The intellect is not made to perceive *development* as a continuity of change. [...] ...the intellect represents *becoming* as a series of *states*, each homogeneous with itself and consequently unchanging. [...] Reason always wants to recreate from the given and consistently misses what is new in each moment. It does not admit the unforeseeable and rejects all creation."[67]

The intellect is satisfied when specific antecedents lead to predictable consequences. This forms the foundation of a mechanical view of the world, which perpetually reconstructs identical outcomes from the same elements. Consequently, this approach falls short in capturing the essence of invention as a creative process, as it attempts to assimilate the novel into an existing, familiar framework. "The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life. Instinct, on the contrary, is moulded on the very form of life. While intelligence treats everything mechanically, instinct proceeds, so to speak, organically. If the consciousness that slumbers in it awaked, if it internalized into knowledge and understanding (meaning if it manifested as intuition) instead of

externalized into action, if we could ask it and it could reply, it would reveal to us the most intimate secrets of life."[68] Instinct is essentially life's continuation in a living form. However, in instinct-driven actions, consciousness typically only emerges at the outset, with the remainder of the process unfolding autonomously. But when the intellect transcends its own boundaries and opens up to intuition, which possesses self-awareness, it becomes capable of grasping life's unity through the emergent intuitive knowledge. As previously mentioned, the light of intuition or the real self can manifest across various planes, but its potential is more discernible in instinct than in reason. Therefore, by examining instinct and its relationship with consciousness, and then elevating this understanding to the mental plane, we can aspire to realize and embody it at a higher level of cognition.

In the exploration of life impulse, it's crucial to address the dynamics of individualization and unification. Life, embodying the essence of consciousness, inherently encompasses multiplicity, which is the primary focus of an outward-oriented intellect. Bergson emphasizes that distinct multiplicity is only feasible in space, where each point is entirely separate from another. This separation emerges from the interaction with matter, which crystallizes what was previously a manifold possibility into distinct individuality. Therefore, individualization results from both matter and life's intrinsic tendencies. We can take, for instance, a poet's inspiration, which is expressed through individual words, lines, and stanzas. While the inspiration inherently contains the multiplicity of elements, it is the materiality of language, taking shape in words, that actualizes this multiplicity, even as these words convey the poet's initial inspiration. Similarly, within distinct individuals, there exists a singularity of life. Yet, alongside the trend towards individualization is a concurrent movement towards unification. "...It's as if the manifold unity of life, which moves towards multiplicity, made just as much effort to retract itself back into itself. The part does not separate from the whole sooner than its tendency to reunify appears. Therefore, the entirety of life is characterized by a balance between individualization and reunification."[69]

Bergson articulates that the vital impulse of life is neither solely unity nor mere diversity. It embodies unity because it is common to all life, yet it exhibits multiplicity in its manifestation across countless forms. The dual evolution of life towards individualization and unification isn't arbitrary; it is intrinsic to life's nature. Understanding this interplay is pivotal, as it illuminates the original intent of the consciousness and the purpose behind the activity of the life-force. Bergson describes creative evolution as a type of striving without a fixed goal, yet in light of the reciprocal relationship between individualization and reunification, this process is also inherently about reunification. The life-force's endeavour to liberate matter is, therefore, intrinsically linked to reunification, though the path to it is not preordained but achieved through continual creation.

From a yogic standpoint, the evolution beyond the mental plane represents a logical progression for humanity, as the mental realm is not the ultimate state of consciousness. The mind, while in

pursuit of reality, does not fully possess it, indicating the existence of a higher state imbued with intuitive wisdom and transcendental awareness. This state offers complete, direct, and immediate knowledge and experience of the world, its origins, purpose, and source – essentially, the real self. It signifies the culmination of subjective evolution.

The descending supramental consciousness emerges as a transformative force within earthly consciousness, becoming active and realizing its potential in those who have fully developed their mental principle or intellect. As intuition and wisdom proliferate in certain individuals, akin to what Bergson observes in mystics, they become capable of exerting a profound influence on earthly existence and nature. This transformation does not occur autonomously but through humanity's gradual ascent to this new plane of being. The existing planes of consciousness will not vanish but rather expand, enabling the use of the intuitive mind in a systematic and dominant manner. The lower functions, in turn, recede into the background. For instance, with heightened intuition, the distorting effects of the lower means – such as the need to fragment and reassemble reality – are diminished. As consciousness expands, ignorance wanes.

Western science has unravelled evolution as the secret of life and the process shaping the material world, but its focus has predominantly been on the evolution of forms and species, not the real self, in other words, consciousness. The self is often deemed accidental, rather than being recognized as the core reason and driving force behind evolution. In contrast, some Eastern thinkers embrace evolution as the growth of the soul or consciousness, which evolves through various forms and numerous individual lives to reach its supreme reality. Within each form resides a conscious being, a self-realizing soul. Consciousness is the fundamental element of existence; its energy, impulse, and movement shape the universe, which is essentially consciousness configuring itself. When the self, engaged in motion and compelled by action, immerses itself in activity, it appears as "unconscious" energy. Similarly, when absorbed in form, it manifests as electrons, atoms, and material objects. Yet, it is still consciousness that operates within the energy and dictates the form and its evolution. As consciousness seeks liberation from matter, it creates progressively evolving forms. The self is the ever-present, intrinsic reality of being, active even when seemingly inactive or invisible on the surface – whether silent and still, inwardly active or inert – and remains present in what is perceived as unconscious and inanimate. Typically, the self is identified with the mind, but the mind's consciousness is just the human measure, limited in its capacity to perceive consciousness, much like the human ability to see only a specific range of colours or hear a limited range of sounds.[70]

From a practical standpoint, the role of subtle physical energy centres, or chakras, merits attention, as they bridge the spiritual and material planes. The lower three chakras are closely tied to physical existence, whereas the upper three relate more to spiritual life, with the heart chakra

serving as the pivotal link between the two realms. These chakras enable the manifestation of the main line of destiny (*sa-bija karma*) through innate qualities and tendencies. Therefore, harmonizing these energy centres is as vital as the cultivation of the mind. Each chakra aligns with the pranic energy (the life-force sheath or *pranamaya-kosha*) at distinct vibrational levels, acting as gateways to different mental states and, on the physical plane, to various brain functions. For instance, in yogic practice, meditating on the *Om* mantra activates the creative principle of light, associated with the Sun's quality, bestowing wisdom, blessings, and awareness of the soul's immortality across the three worlds (physical, subtle physical, and causal planes).[71]

sarva-dvārāṇi saṁyamya mano hṛdi nirudhya ca
mūrdhny ādhāyātmanaḥ prāṇam āsthito yoga-dhāraṇām
oṁ ity ekākṣaraṁ brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran
yaḥ prayāti tyajan dehaṁ sa yāti paramāṁ gatim
ananya-cetāḥ satataṁ yo māṁ smarati nityaśaḥ
tasyāhaṁ su-labhaḥ pārtha nitya-yuktasya yoginaḥ
mām upetya punar janma duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam
nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ saṁsiddhiṁ paramāṁ gatāḥ

A yogi who closes off all the (nine) sensory gates, retreats the mind (*manas*) into the heart-chakra, and channels the life-force (*prana*) into the crown-chakra, while engaging in focused yogic contemplation (*dharana*), vibrates continuously with the sacred syllable *Om*. This syllable represents the indestructible *Brahman*. Remembering me (God) at the moment of departing the body, such a practitioner achieves the Supreme Goal. Those who remember me unswervingly and unite unwaveringly in yoga can easily reach me. Having attained me, these great souls do not return to this transient world of suffering, for they have achieved the highest perfection. **Bhagavad Gita 8.12–15**

2. The Significance of Joy and Love

What is joy a sign of? – The nature of happiness – Joy and love as the nature of reality and its manifestation in the various planes of existence

In our exploration of reality, we have delved into two aspects: existence and the real self, along with its power. Yet, there is a third dimension equally integral to the nature of reality: love and joy.

Bergson touches upon the theme of joy in his various works, underscoring its significance in understanding life impulse. He differentiates between joy and pleasure, highlighting that, "Philosophers who have speculated on the meaning of life and on the destiny of man have failed to take sufficient notice of an indication which nature itself has given us. Nature informs us by a clear sign when we've reached out goal. That sign is joy. I mean joy, not pleasure. Pleasure is only a contrivance devised by nature to obtain for the creature the preservation of its life; it does not indicate the direction in which life is thrusting. But joy always announces that life has succeeded, gained ground, conquered. All great joy has a triumphant note."[72] Thus, life is intrinsically characterized by joy, but similar to how the flow of life's vitality faces obstacles and is fully experienced only in exceptional cases, true joy is also often limited.

If we previously identified the life impulse as the creative energy of reality, we can now extend this to assert that the essence of reality also encompasses love and joy, both conscious in nature. The unity of life resides in the impulse itself, in the driving force that propels it persistently forward in time. Harmony, therefore, is not a result achieved at life's culmination, but an inherent attribute of consciousness and life, manifesting in the increasing harmony and joy evident in life's ever more liberated impulse towards reunification.

Thus far, our discussion has centred on the vitality of life in a broad sense. However, the key question remains: how do we, as human beings, comprehend and actualize life's triumph in our personal existence? Bergson posits, "If, then, in every domain the triumph of life is creation, must we not suppose that human life has its goal in a creation which, unlike that of the artist and philosopher, can be pursued always by all men – creation of self by self, the growing of the personality by an effort which draws much from little, something from nothing, and adds unceasingly to whatever wealth the world contains?"[73] This perspective reveals how the unfolding activity of the life impulse is mirrored in individual lives, elucidating the original intent of the self and God for the world and humanity. The process of continual self-transcendence and self-creation allows an individual to align their personal life with the universal flow of life. A daily manifestation of this alignment is the experience of flow, where the mind/intellect is actively engaged and present, not drifting in space or time, but deeply focused on the current activity. This state signifies a temporal transcendence, characterized by stillness, expansiveness, and the relegation of mundane needs to the background. By intentionally disrupting the mind's static tendencies and infusing tasks with dynamism and flow through deep concentration, we can exercise control over our engagement with life.

The essence of evolution, as Bergson illuminates, lies in the life impulse's effort to foster freedom within the confines of determined matter. This is evident in his assertion that we are all processes, trajectories of development, rather than static beings or entities. The life impulse naturally gravitates

towards freedom, joy, and love, offering us glimpses into the grand movements of which we are a part. It is through these movements that life advances, and it is love that ultimately unveils the deepest secrets of life.[74]

Joy is intimately connected to love, a creative force exemplified in the lives of saints and mystics, who personify a unique manifestation of the life impulse. Bergson's quest for reality led him to a significant realization: the deepening and expansion of intuition parallels the inner experience of God as described by Christian mystics. Since these mystics align their actions with God's intent, they become conduits for the evolution of the soul and consciousness, serving as direct witnesses to both God and love. Their mystical intuitions appear as extensions of life's undivided current, paving the way to immortality.[75] Bergson reflects, "In truth, if we were sure, absolutely sure, of survival (immortality), we could not think of anything else. Our pleasures would still remain, but drab and jejune (i.e. bloodless, colourless, etc.), because their intensity was merely the attention that we centred upon them. They would pale like our electric lamps before the morning sun. Pleasure would be eclipsed by joy."[76]

The mystic's experience not only echoes the essence of the life impulse but is also a manifestation of the love impulse. These saints' inner journeys reveal God as a living reality, characterized by undivided, perpetual, and abundant life, free creation, and personal love. In this unity, the human will merges with the divine will, allowing one to become truly free. Thought, liberated from the constraints of matter, realizes its full potential. Human thinking, expanded infinitely, discerns through intuition that love is the driving force behind the vital impulse of all, the creative evolution flowing through time. In this context, God embodies both the energy of love and creation. What is perceived as love by the mystic is seen as creative power by the philosopher. Similarly, what the mystic identifies as God, the philosopher understands as the self or the source of consciousness. This unity of creative power and love suggests that love is the foundation and origin of all manifestations, fostering fraternal relationships among all forms of existence. As all creation and beings emanate from the source – the real self, God – it is God who loves first and places trust in us. Our realization and response to this love manifests as our faith and trust in God, and our love for It. Through this love, we profoundly experience our existence in God and from God, understanding that everything originates from It and ultimately returns to It.[77]

"God is love and the object of love: herein lies the whole contribution of mysticism. About this twofold love, the mystic will never have done talking. Its description is interminable, because what he wants to describe is ineffable. But what he does state clearly is that divine love is not a thing of God: it is God Himself."[78] Mystics embody a continual triumph of creative evolution, each representing a unique manifestation of the self breaking through the material plane. Their collective testimony aligns on a singular truth: love is both the cause and purpose of existence. These mystics

have also contributed to the vision of creating a supramental humanity. In his philosophical journey, Bergson, seeking the source of vitality, approached the Absolute in a manner akin to those mystics who bear witness to God. His aim was to render God's existence an experiential truth, positing that existence is most authentically grasped through experience. Bergson advocated that only an inner, metaphysical experience, seeking direct knowledge of existence, could unveil the entirety of reality. He believed the Absolute reveals itself both within and without, accessible through true seeing and the use of intuition. This approach allows us to discover the Absolute in our being and our being in the Absolute.

The parallels between Bergson's thoughts and the yogic tradition, as well as ancient scriptures, are striking. Our life's purpose is to evolve into a supramental human being, embodying the Supreme Truth (*Brahman*) within ourselves and our lives. The joy and happiness of existence (*ananda*) stem not from transient pleasures but from the deeper joy of the source and goal that sustains truth-seekers on the spiritual path. Life can be likened to a mountain to be ascended level by level. This ascent is our duty and destiny, the purpose and joy of our existence, for it is in our nature to transcend: to go beyond the limited self with which we seem to be identified, our body-mind, imprisoned by the lower planes of body, vital force, and mind. In yoga, we unveil within our being what is already present, not something external. Our ultimate transformation is into the real self (*Atman*), the source of consciousness, the soul commanding these three instruments (body, vital force, and mind) as master of its nature. The real self is free, unified, immortal, radiant with light and love, existing in the infinite while encompassing the finite. This leads to the question: what then is the cause of man's bondage?

bhogaiśvarya-prasaktānāṁ tayāpahṛtacetasām
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate

The human mind, often beguiled by sensory pleasures and material pursuits, finds it challenging to achieve *samadhi*, the unbroken state of deep concentration reached through intellectual focus. **Bhagavad Gita 2.44**

parāñci khāni vyatṛṇatsvayambhūstasmātparāṅpaśyati nāntarātman
kaściddhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣadāvṛttacakśuramṛtatvamicchan

The self-existent Absolute has oriented the senses outwardly, leading human beings to perceive the external world rather than the inner Self (*Atman*). However, those who can redirect their sensory

focus from external objects towards the quest for immortality are granted the vision of the Self within. **Katha Upanishad 2.1.1**

Experiencing the Self, with its inherent attributes such as immortality, becomes feasible through the conscious centre that resides within all entities. This shift from an externally oriented intellect to an inward, intuitive exploration enables one to engage directly with reality. In this profound experience, the seeker discovers unity with the self, realizing that our true essence is indistinguishable from the source of all existence. Our perception of separate existence is merely superficial. The direct perception of the soul is intrinsically an experience of joy and love.

aṇoraṇīyānmahato mahīyānātmāsya jantornihito guhāyāṃ
tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuḥ prasādānmahimānamātmanaḥ

The Self is subtler than the subtlest, greater than the greatest, and dwells in the cave of the heart of every being. When one transcends desire, harmonizing the mind and senses, the magnificence of the soul becomes apparent, liberating one from all forms of sorrow. **Katha Upanishad 1.2.20**

atha ya eṣa samprasādo'smāccharīrātsamutthāya paraṃ jyotirupasampadya svena
rūpeṇābhiniṣpadyata eṣa ātmeti hovācaitadamṛtamabhayametadbrahmeti
tasya ha vā etasya brahmaṇo nāma satyamiti

Upon leaving the physical body, this Self, the embodiment of bliss, ascends to the supreme light, embracing its true nature. This Self is immortal and fearless, embodying the Absolute, *Brahman*, also known as Truth. **Chhandogya Upanishad 8.3.4**

The Infinite Self (*Purusha*) is both manifested and unmanifested. The attributeless Supreme, akin to pure light dispersing through a prism to reveal the spectrum of colors, unfolds into the diverse creation through its own power (*Shakti*). At the dawn of creation, all manifested forms emerge from the unmanifest, and at the culmination of the cosmic cycle, they return to this unseen state. Our ability to perceive the Self in all beings directly influences the continuity of love and joy in our lives. The Supreme, being the wellspring of all joy, bestows upon the aspirant who realizes it a state of sublime bliss, where true freedom is experienced. The pursuit of continuous happiness in the transient world is inherently flawed, as the impermanent nature of the things we seek happiness in means that the happiness gained is equally finite.

jñānena tu tad ajñānaṁ yeṣāṁ nāśitam ātmanaḥ
teṣām āditya-vaj jñānaṁ prakāśayati tat param

But in those in whom the wisdom of self-knowledge destroys ignorance, the light of knowledge flares up, and the Supreme Self illuminates everything like the sun. **Bhagavad Gita 5.16**

kaviṁ purāṇam anuśāsitāram aṇor aṇīyāṁsam anusmared yaḥ
sarvasya dhātāram acintya-rūpam āditya-varṇaṁ tamasaḥ parastāt

Meditate on the Supreme as omniscient, the most ancient, the sovereign ruler, subtler than the subtlest, the sustainer of all, of inconceivable form, resplendent like the sun, and beyond all darkness. **Bhagavad Gita 8.9**

yadvai tat sukṛtam, raso vai saḥ, rasaṁ hyevāyaṃ labdhvānandī bhavati, ko hyevānyātkaḥ prāṇyāt,
yadeṣa ākāśa ānando na syāt, eṣa hyevānandayāti

This self-existent *Brahman* is indeed the essence of joy underlying all existence, manifested solely for the experience of bliss. In realizing this divine essence, one becomes imbued with profound joy. Who indeed could breathe or live if pure bliss did not dwell in the space (*akasha*) within the heart? *Brahman* is this very existence, the source of supreme bliss. **Taittiriya Upanishad 2.7.2**

The *Atman*, which is identical to *Brahman*, is an eternal, unchanging presence that pervades all realms of existence. As the embodiment of bliss, it imparts varying degrees of joy across all planes of being. Yet, as long as our happiness remains fleeting and temporary, we have not yet grasped the essence of supreme joy. This ultimate happiness, inherent in the nature of the *Atman* or *Brahman*, is perpetual and independent of external objects or circumstances.

sa ya eṣo-aṇimaitad ātmyam idaṁ sarvaṁ tat satyaṁ sa ātmā tat tvam asi śvetaketo iti bhūya eva
mā bhagavān vijñāpatv iti tathā somyeti hovāca

My dear son, you can neither separate yourself from it nor stand outside of it. Everything flows from it, including you. Every time you name yourself, or address others or things, you are always speaking of it — the Soul. Every shape or form exists within it; none can be apart from it. It is the essence of the entire universe, the Self of all beings, and this Ātman or Soul is the Truth. Thus, you are That (*Tat twam asi*), O Shvetaketu! **Chhandogya Upanishad 6.8.7**

The pathway to true happiness lies in the conscious recognition and practice of the truth that the real self (*Atman/Brahman*) and its divine energy, *Shakti*, are omnipresent. As we cultivate the ability to perceive ourselves, the world, and the Supreme in this light, we draw nearer to the real self, partake in its bliss, dwell within it, and ultimately merge with it. In ancient scriptures, wisdom (*vijnana*) is equated with an expanded state of intuitive consciousness, akin to the intuition described by Bergson. Joy, too, can be understood as an experience of inwardly focused consciousness. When the mind ceases its outward wanderings, even briefly, and returns to its origin, the absence of external focus allows joy to surface. Although objects may facilitate this moment of joy, the bliss experienced is not external in origin. It is a momentary experience, which is why the mind cannot comprehend it and is unable to remember it. True joy and love are intrinsic to the real self, a universal bliss of which only a limited experience is accessible due to the layers that veil the Self. The moments of pure joy are rare in human life, perpetuating a relentless search. This suggests that when the mind is constantly outward-focused, the opportunity for an inner spark of happiness diminishes.

Ultimate perfection is achieved as the lowest realms ascend to the highest, and the highest descends to the lowest, until everything converges into a harmonious unity and a dynamic multiplicity of Truth. The aspirant transcends the mental world, attains wisdom, elevates the lower aspects into this wisdom, and ultimately elevates their entire being into the consciousness of bliss, culminating in the self-realization of the Infinite. Intuitive wisdom ascends to the supreme light from which it descended, bridging the gap between the mind and the real self. *Ananda*, the essential nature of the real self, surpasses the highest forms of human bliss. While a fragment of this bliss is accessible on the lower planes, we can only experience bliss corresponding to our level of consciousness. The soul residing in the realm of love and joy ceases to seek beyond itself, for it already is in the ultimate state, viewing all from this vantage point. In this state, the notion of a central point dissipates; boundaries vanish, revealing the unity of the undivided self. The soul, omnipresent, perceives itself in all places; it has no singular dwelling, for everything becomes its abode. In this realm, all consciousness, power, form, and function are expressions of infinite love.

satyaṃ jñānamanantaṃ brahma viśuddhaṃ paraṃ svataḥsiddham
nityānandaikarasaṃ pratyagabhinnaṃ nirantaraṃ jayati
sadidaṃ paramādvaitaṃ svasmādanyasya vastuno'bhāvāt
na hyanyadasti kiṃcitsamyakparamārthatattvabodhadaśāyām

Brahman is Reality, Knowledge, and Infinity. It is pure, supreme, self-existent, eternal, and indivisible bliss, and in fact, it is not different from the (embodied) soul, and is eternally victorious.

This Supreme One is the only true reality, for nothing else exists but the Self. In fact, in the state of the realization of the highest truth, no other existence remains. **Viveka Chudamani 225–26**

Enlightened persons, much like the mystics explored by Bergson, exude a radiance marked by serenity and joy. They embody a harmony of peace, happiness, and love, maintaining spiritual equilibrium even amidst life's challenges and imperfections. The Self dwelling within the human being is distinct from that in which it exists, as well as from its external environment. Outer and inner sensory perceptions flow continuously, but the seeker gradually learns that he himself is not identical with them; they are merely connected to the sense organs. This brings about the attainment of inner calm. In recognizing the omnipresent and perfect nature of *Brahman*, which encapsulates the entirety of the universe, one realizes that true knowledge can only be found within: the knower and the known are fundamentally unified. Everything we experience – whether it's on the physical, mental, or intellectual planes – is an expression of the Absolute. Thus, the human being can recognize one's own *Brahman*-nature.

Through the practice of yoga, this realization of the real self begins internally. As this awareness deepens and solidifies, it expands to encompass all facets of our being, transforming our mental, vital, and physical aspects. This internal transformation liberates us from what once was binging us. As a result, illumined actions, thoughts, and feelings arise, capable of uplifting the world around us. This phenomenon is vividly illustrated in the lives of mystic saints, who through their realized love, bring a profound positive change to the world. Their existence is a testament to the transformative power of enlightenment, where the individual soul recognizes and manifests its *Brahman*-nature, not only within but also in its interactions with the external world.[79]

vaneṣu jāyurmarteṣu mitro vṛṇīte śruṣṭiṁ rājevājuryam
kṣemo na sādhuḥ kraturna bhadro bhuvat svādhirhotā havyavāṭ
haste dadhāno nṛmṇā viśvānyame devān dhād guhā niṣīdan
vidantīmatra naro dhiyandhā hṛdā yat taṣṭān mantrānaśaṁsan
ajo na kṣāṁ dādhāra pṛthivīṁ tastambha dyāṁ mantrebhiḥ satyaiḥ
priyā padāni paśvo ni pāhi viśvāyuragne guhā guhaṁ gāḥ
ya īṁ ciketa guhā bhavantamā yaḥ sasāda dhārāṁ ṛtasya
vi ye cṛtanty ṛtā sapanta ādid vasūni pra vavācāsmai

He is the conqueror in the forests, he is the friend in mortals. He chooses for himself inspired knowledge just as a king an unaging councillor. He is like a perfect good, he is like a happy will just in its thoughts. He has become to us the priest of our sacrifice and the carrier of our offerings. He

holds in his hands all mights: sitting in the secret cave of being he founds the gods in strength. And it is there that men who hold the thought in their minds, when they have given utterance to its sacred words carved into shape by the heart, discover the god. He holds like one unborn the wide earth our dwelling-place and pillars heaven with the truth of the sacred words of his thinking. O Flame, thou art universal life; guard the pleasant footholds of the light of vision; watch over the herd of the rays in the secrecy of the secret cavern. He who has known him in the secret cave, he who has come to the stream of the Truth, all who touch and penetrate into the things of the Truth, to such he speaks the word of his treasures. **Rig Veda 1.67.1–4**

III. Time

1. Duration and Static Time

Absolute and relative time – The nature and meaning of time and space – The present encompasses the whole of the past

Henri Bergson's philosophy, particularly his notion of "duration", offers a profound understanding of spiritual life as a quality that continually renews itself in time. He conceptualizes duration as a fusion of past experiences flowing into and asserting themselves in the present. It represents consciousness's way of existing in time, characterized by unity and indivisibility. This unity allows for the perception of all experiences as a single, organic whole, transcending divisions such as external and internal or the temporal segmentation into past, present, and future. These divisions are constructs of the intellect, which perceives static states in succession, unable to grasp the uninterrupted flow of experience. In contrast, duration encapsulates and carries forward all past experiences, a key feature of consciousness that can be directly known through presence.

Valéria Dienes, a student of Bergson and the translator of his works into Hungarian, provides insights into how his philosophy was applied across various domains. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson reformulates the problem of freedom; *Matter and Memory* sheds light on the relationship between body and soul, matter and spirit, laying the foundations for a new psychology; and *Creative Evolution* applies his foundational approach to developmental considerations, leading to a specific dualistic cosmogony.[80] Bergson's philosophy can be described as a qualitative multiplicity, and with his conception based on heterogeneous continuity, he became a forerunner of all those who thought in terms of systems and complexity. This self-organizing time, manifesting uniquely within each individual, perpetually generates novelty and is intrinsically structured. It maintains its distinct identity and continuous transformation independently, without relying on external forms, matter, or even individuals for synthesis. This process is marked by inherent systematicity and coherence, identifiable through its characteristic impulse. This impulse reflects a dynamic interplay of internal elements, including the introspective assimilation of its own attributes, the cumulative gathering of memories and knowledge, and the interactions of feedforward and feedback mechanisms.[81]

In summarizing key aspects of Henri Bergson's concept of duration, it's vital to regard the pairs like space and duration, matter and memory, present and past as representing differences not in degree but fundamentally in nature. Our perception of differences as merely varying in intensity stems from a common notion that matter and space, being external and separate entities, vary only

in degrees and exist independently (and exist for us). However, this is a superficial understanding. In reality, the distinction is much more profound and intrinsic. The soul or consciousness (often also called memory by Bergson), along with duration, exist as indivisible and inherent aspects, not just externally but intrinsically for their own sake. In this context, all material forms, despite their apparent diversity, coexist within the same framework of duration (which embodies nature or life). This intrinsic connection highlights the unity of all aspects of existence, transcending the superficial differences perceived in matter and space.[82]

The essence and effect of duration loses its continuous and dynamic character when subjected to spatial measurement or mathematical quantification. Mathematical time is often represented as a static, straight line, emphasizing the beginning and ending points of intervals and neglecting the fluidity of actual experience. This concept of time is "virtual" because real time cannot be halted without pausing existence itself. Our perception of time is deeply subjective and varies significantly based on our mental state. For instance, when one is deeply engaged in a challenging but skill-matched task, experiencing "flow" as articulated by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the awareness of time dissipates, and it seems to pass rapidly. Conversely, in states of boredom or anxious anticipation, time feels like it's dragging. This subjective experience of time underscores a fundamental difference in our consciousness, contrasting starkly with the objective, unvarying nature of time as measured by material standards.[83]

Creation encompasses a spectrum of degrees, each contributing to an overarching totality. Viewing these degrees in isolation leads to the formulation of philosophical concepts like monism and dualism, which, while useful, only capture fragments of the entire picture. Duration, or creative nature, represents one such degree. It's akin to a condensed entity, brimming with potential yet to be manifested. Matter, or created nature, contrasts this as a more relaxed entity, embodying aspects of creation that have already materialized. However, even when these degrees are considered together, they do not fully encapsulate the complete reality. Monism and dualism, while addressing different aspects of this reality, fall short of comprehensively describing it. They are perspectives that highlight specific angles of the vast tapestry of creation but do not entirely grasp its inherent, unmanifested, unified totality. This totality transcends preconceived divisions and categories, existing as a singular, undivided whole that defies simplistic characterization. It encompasses both the potential and the actual, the manifested and the unmanifested, in a seamless, dynamic continuum of existence.[84]

In yogic philosophy, this idea resonates with the principle of "One becomes many". Different schools of thought focus on aspects of reality – whether it's the primacy of the unified source, the reality of transformation, or the truth in diversity. However, a holistic approach recognizes the

organic interconnection of these elements, suggesting that the evolution of human consciousness involves a journey from “many” to “One”.

The vital force (or vital impulse, called as *élan vital*) in Bergson's framework is the dynamic expression and ongoing development of an initially unified and unmanifested totality. This undivided origin is the foundation from which actual life emerges, manifesting its inherent potential. Both the manifest and unmanifest are equally real, transitioning between states through creative activity. Our perception differentiates these states, recognizing the manifested as tangible and real. As duration intertwines with matter, it transforms into life, facing obstacles and diversifying due to internal tension. The source, an unmanifest entity, manifests through movement, each aspect reflecting the original source in its uniqueness.

The vital impulse operates in two distinct yet interconnected directions: the creation or involution, where consciousness spreads and envelops itself into various forms, descending into matter; and the evolution or rewinding of creation, where consciousness transcends the forms it has assumed, ascending back to the duration. This dual movement encompasses both the descent into matter and the ascent back to a unified state of consciousness characterized by duration. Forms represent pauses in this fluid movement, and point to where life momentarily alienates itself from its original state, losing its inherent interconnectedness. In this cosmic process, everything exists simultaneously within a universal consciousness or memory, embodying different degrees of wholeness. Each lineage maintains an aspect of the whole, creating physical, vital, and psychological counterparts at various levels of existence. If we place the things that have come into being back into the movement that created them, and thus relate them to the unmanifest that is manifested in them, it becomes evident that separation is of a creative nature.[85]

The Vedic tradition speaks of a Cosmic Self, where the Supreme or Absolute manifests as the source of consciousness in all things, eliminating the notion of separation or alienation. Our essential self is inseparable from our being, yet often we perceive a division between ourselves and other living entities or objects in the world. This perception of separateness is a manifestation of limited understanding, where we only recognize universal objecthood and fail to perceive or experience the self in everything. In contrast, the self, or the universal consciousness, is inherently present in all forms and beings. Through practices like meditation, we can cultivate an awareness of this universal self within us. At any given moment, our consciousness can either be attuned to the universal self or be fixated on objecthood and the objectified state of existence. When we become conscious of the universal self, it is a form of liberation from the confines of narrow, distorted perception. This broader consciousness recognizes that all existence is, in reality, a manifestation of the self. The inner essence of all things is this very self, and it is through this lens that we must approach and understand the world. This universal consciousness is all-encompassing and absolute,

embodying the unity of all creation without distinction or duality. When we perceive something as separate from the self, we are not acknowledging it in its true nature, leading to a perception of diversity and separateness.

The world as effect is identical with its cause, that is, with the Absolute, with Brahman, through the knowledge of which everything can be known. Since the whole of creation is the outpouring of Brahman, it is therefore not different from it. While consciousness and its energy are without beginning, the perceptions experienced in material creation are transitory, existing only in the consciousness of the observer with differing levels of awareness. The observer exists in a quality of space-time and a plane of consciousness corresponding to his own development, and accordingly perceives his outer and inner world. The existence of the Absolute, or *Brahman*, is independent of our awareness. The universe acts as a medium through which we can discern the presence of the Absolute. *Brahman* manifests in countless forms, yet these manifestations do not differ from its essential nature. Each manifestation of *Brahman* in the universe is an expression of its singular reality. This understanding is crucial when we experience the various aspects and effects of the universe. It's essential to maintain awareness that these diverse experiences and manifestations are fundamentally not separate from *Brahman*. They are expressions of the same underlying reality. By recognizing this, we remain connected to the original cause even as we engage with its myriad effects. Meditation on *Brahman* as identical to the Self (*Atman*) is crucial.

ātmānaṁ rathinaṁ viddhi śarīraṁ ratham eva tu
buddhiṁ tu sārathiṁ viddhi manaḥ pragraham eva ca
indriyāṇi hayān āhur viṣayāṁs teṣu gocarān
ātmendriya-mano-yuktam bhoktety āhur manīṣiṇaḥ
yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty ayuktena manasā sadā
tasyendriyāṇy avaśyāni duṣṭāśvā iva sāratheḥ
yas tu vijñānavān bhavati yuktena manasā sadā
tasyendriyāṇi vaśyāni sadaśvā iva sāratheḥ ...
indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyaśca param manaḥ
manasastu parā buddhirbuddherātmā mahān paraḥ
mahataḥ paramavyaktamavyaktātpuruṣaḥ paraḥ
puruṣān na paraṁ kiñcit sā kāṣṭhā sā paramā gatiḥ
eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho-ātmā na prakāśate
dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣmadarśibhiḥ
yacchedvāṇ manasī prājñastad yacchejñāna ātmani
jñānamātmani mahati niyacchet tad yacchecchānta ātmani ...

aśabdam asparśam arūpam avyayaṁ
tathā'rasaṁ nityam-agandhavaccayat
anādyanantaṁ mahataḥ paraṁ dhruvaṁ
nicāyya tan mṛtyumukhāt pramucyate

Know that the Ātman, or Soul, is the master (the rider) of the chariot; the physical body is the chariot itself; discriminative intellect is the charioteer; and the mind is the reins. It is said that the senses are the horses, and the sense-objects are the roads along which the chariot travels, while the Self, joined with the senses, the mind, and the body, is called by the wise the enjoyer. He whose discriminative intellect is lost, and whose mind is ever undisciplined, is unable to control his senses, like a charioteer trying to direct unruly horses. But those who possess sufficient wisdom know that they must ceaselessly master their mind, and thus their senses too become obedient, like the horses of a disciplined driver. [...] Higher than the senses are the subtle elements; beyond them is the mind; above the mind stands intelligence; and beyond intelligence is the *Atman*, the most powerful. Beyond the Cosmic Intellect (*Mahat-tattva*), is the supreme Unmanifest; beyond that, the *Purusha*. Beyond the *Purusha* there is nothing—he is the ultimate goal. He is the *Atman*, the Self, hidden within all beings; his light cannot be directly perceived, but only the seers, those of refined intellect, may behold it. The sage withdraws his speech into the mind, the mind into the intellect, the intellect into the Cosmic Intellect, and that into the tranquil Self, the *Atman*. [...] He who perceives the soundless, eternal, untouchable, formless, tasteless, scentless, and infinite supreme Reality that is without beginning or end—he is said to be freed from death. **Katha Upanishad 1.3.3–6 & 1.3.10–13 & 1.3.15**

prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva viddhy anādī ubhāv api
vikārāṁś ca guṇāṁś caiva viddhi prakṛti-sambhavān
kārya-kāraṇa-kartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtir ucyate
puruṣaḥ sukha-duḥkhānāṁ bhoktṛtve hetur ucyate

Both the real self (*Purusha*) and nature (*Prakriti*) are fundamental, eternal entities. *Prakriti* is the source of the material universe and the various forms we perceive, giving rise to the qualities (*guna*) which shape our lived experience. It is responsible for creating the cause-and-effect chain and the life conditions of a being. On the other hand, *Purusha*, the real self, is the impetus behind an individual's experiences of joy and sorrow. **Bhagavad Gita 13.20–21**

deho'hamityeva jaḍasya buddhiḥ dehe ca jīve viduṣastvahaṃdhīḥ
vivekavijñānavato mahātmano brahmāhamityeva matiḥ sadātmani

The uninformed person identifies solely with the physical body, perceiving "I am the body" as their reality. A more knowledgeable individual, acquainted with spiritual texts, perceives themselves as a combination of body and soul. However, a truly wise and discerning sage, having attained enlightenment, realizes their identity with *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, and views themselves as the eternal self. **Viveka Chudamani 160**

tato 'bhavan mahat-tattvam avyaktāt kāla-coditāt
vijñānātmātma-deha-sthaṁ viśvaṁ vyañjaṁs tamo-nudaḥ

In the cosmic process, under the influence of time, the great element of wisdom or knowledge, known as *mahat-tattva*, emerges from the unmanifested energy of the Absolute. This *mahat-tattva* is imbued with the power of *vijnana*, or intuitive knowledge, which dispels the shadows of ignorance and unveils the universe hidden within the Self. **Bhagavata Purana 3.5.27**

According to Bergson, when in our thinking we confuse the objective and the subjective world, or space and time, the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, inertia and creation, this determines and narrows down our conclusions, making reality itself unattainable. This approach leads to a mechanical, pre-determined view of reality, where everything seems preordained and static. He argues for a creative conception of time, emphasizing that creation is an ongoing, visible process in the world. In this view, reality is a dynamic continuum, where each part connects to a greater whole, and life moves in a clear direction. This perspective opens up a space where cosmic consciousness can liberate individuals from constrained life paths, enabling them to become creators within the larger movement of creation. This liberation is especially pronounced in exceptional souls, where intuition emerges from intellect through action and creation.[86]

In human experience, Bergson notes that the life impulse becomes self-aware. He introduces the concept of subjective time, which differs from measurable, objective time. Subjective time is characterized by a sense of "presentness," where the past is absorbed into the present, and the future is an extension of the current moment. This "...implies the perception, no longer successive, but simultaneous, of a *before* and *after*..."[87] Furthermore, many aspects of human experience, such as feelings, emotions, and mental images, cannot be quantified or measured in objective terms.[88]

Henri Bergson's exploration of time contrasts the static, homogeneous concept accepted in mathematics and physics with his own perception of time as a dynamic, heterogeneous entity. The traditional view of time, as understood in the modern sciences, is characterized by a succession of divisible moments, measurable and objective, where differences in intensity or degree can be

quantified. This "homogeneous time" is akin to space – it has extension and serves as the medium for inanimate, discontinuous matter. Bergson, however, envisaged time as an indivisible and unified whole, a "heterogeneous time" that is constantly in motion, flowing and creating. In this view, time is not a series of external moments but a continuous present, where moments interpenetrate and merge into a new quality (*Time and Free Will*). This conception of time is experiential and subjective, where the quality of experience directly influences its perception. It is marked by an internal duration that reflects the state of individual consciousness, characterized by continual qualitative changes in the contents of consciousness. This heterogeneous time cannot be separated or divided; its parts overlap and intermingle, forming a qualitative multiplicity.

In Bergson's philosophy, time understood as succession belongs to the intellect, while duration – the ongoing, experiential aspect of time – is aligned with the real self. It's through consciousness and contemplation that this aspect of time can be truly experienced, leading to a state where perception becomes intuitive. Intuition, in this context, is realized in duration, providing a deeper understanding of reality. He presents a dual perception of reality shaped by these two interpretations of time:

- Homogeneous perception of reality, associated with space and matter, characterized by measurable, quantitative aspects.
- Heterogeneous perception of reality, linked to consciousness, defined by qualitative, experiential aspects.

The distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous perceptions lies fundamentally in their nature, leading to a complementary relationship between the two. Typically, our experiences are an amalgamation of both perceptions, highlighting the necessity of movement and interaction that are both distinctive and collaborative. We move through space (homogeneous perception) while simultaneously experiencing the movement internally (heterogeneous perception). This interplay underscores the differences in our experiences but also bridges them, suggesting that these differences are not insurmountable but rather integral parts of a cohesive whole.[89]

In this context, the need to redefine time in philosophy or metaphysics arises from its potential to offer a more accurate description of reality. The distinction between the priority of space and time leads to two different kinds of epistemological approaches. The spatial perspective is suited for transmitting ideas and conveying consciousness externally, while the temporal approach is intrinsically linked to consciousness, transforming everything into a process or happening. "The

concept of a metaphysical reform of time posits that by reinterpreting our understanding of time, we can revitalize and recontextualize ancient truths and philosophical tenets in a new, dynamic framework. This reformulation does not seek to alter the core essence of these truths but aims to unfold them more fully, enriching their relevance and applicability to contemporary human experience. By embracing this evolved perspective on time, thought can resonate with the rhythm of time, allowing age-old wisdom to be expressed in a language that is both fresh and deeply resonant with the human soul. The intention is not to discard the old for the sake of novelty, but to allow these eternal ideas to continually reemerge, taking on new forms and significance in each individual's consciousness. This process leads to a personal and unique illumination of these ideas, as each person internalizes and interprets them in a way that speaks to their own soul. Thus, rigid conceptual thinking transforms into a more fluid state of consciousness, transcending mere intellectual understanding. Ideas become more than abstract concepts; they turn into living beliefs and intrinsic values, deeply integrated into the fabric of one's life. This transformation fosters a personal connection with the ideas, leading to a kind of spiritual or human conversion where thought becomes a vehicle for profound personal growth and soul formation."[90]

In the Vedic tradition, the concept of time and space is profoundly intertwined with the understanding of the Absolute, the ultimate source and essence of all creation, because the Absolute delimits itself through them in order to bring about creation. It perceives the Absolute as the foundational "One Being," the originator of everything, including the inherent intent to create. This Being is both the manifestation of creative intention and its expression, yet it remains enigmatic in its nature, transcending simple notions of identity or distinction. The scriptures aim to illuminate higher planes of existence, the true nature of Reality, and the manifestation of creation, serving both as focal points for meditation and philosophical exploration. A key aspect of this exploration is understanding the relationship between the Supreme Cause, the process of creation, and the created beings.

The Supreme Being is conceptualized as the eternal "I," the pure consciousness of existence, often referred to as "I am who I am" or simply "I am." This is the primary position of the Absolute. From this singularity, the One diversifies into many forms, manifesting as space, time, and objects. This initial division represents the bifurcation of experience or sensation, leading to the alienation of the Self into the dual roles of subject and object – the observer and the observed. However, the Absolute itself is beyond such duality; it is not confined by the limitations of subject and object.

When the Supreme assumes the role of an object to itself, it enters the state of God (*Ishwara*), representing a universal inclination towards separateness or objectification. This state is not the actual manifestation but rather a potential or a seed from which the universe can emerge. The universe, in its entirety, is contained within this seed of the Absolute's intention, representing the

beginning of an inseparable consciousness of subject and object. Over time, this tendency towards self-alienation and objectification intensifies, illustrating the journey of the self experiencing itself, eventually becoming an object of its own self-reflection. This process is integral to the individual's journey back to the Absolute, achieved through the practice of yoga, which seeks to reunite the individual consciousness with its original source. In this way, the individual transcends the limitations of personal identity, merging back into the undifferentiated unity of the Absolute.[91]

prakṛter guṇa-sāmyasya nirviśeṣasya mānavi
ceṣṭā yataḥ sa bhagavān kāla ity upalakṣitaḥ
antaḥ puruṣa-rūpeṇa kāla-rūpeṇa yo bahiḥ
samanvety eṣa sattvānāṁ bhagavān ātma-māyayā
daivāt kṣubhita-dharmiṇyāṁ svasyāṁ yonau paraḥ pumān
ādhatta vīryaṁ sāsūta mahat-tattvaṁ hiraṇmayam
viśvam ātma-gataṁ vyañjan kūṭastho jagad-aṅkuraḥ
sva-tejasāpibat tīvram ātma-prasvāpanaṁ tamaḥ

Divine energy, symbolized as time, is the catalyst that disrupts the original equilibrium of nature's (*Prakriti*) undifferentiated qualities. This energy awakens the dormant potential within Prakriti, leading to the dynamic process of creation and evolution. The *Purusha*, the real self, permeates all living beings, acting as an omnipresent controller within them, while simultaneously existing as the concept of time outside them. The interaction between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* sets off a chain reaction, wherein *Purusha's* inherent power stirs up the qualities within *Prakriti*, initiating the process that sets the destinies of all living beings in motion. From this interaction emerges the *mahat-tattva*, the cosmic intellect, envisioned as a luminous principle akin to gold. This eternal cause, yearning to manifest the universe hidden within its subtle form, radiates its light, dispelling the dense darkness of ignorance and unveiling the cosmic intelligence obscured during the periods of cosmic dissolution. **Bhagavata Purana 3.26.17–20**

The creative will operates as a transformative force, progressively objectifying itself through various stages of existence: beginning with the causal realm, moving into the subtler realms of physical existence, and culminating in the gross physical world, composed of the five fundamental elements and their myriad creations. This process reflects a universal unity that manifests as a practical diversity, or conversely, a universal diversity underpinned by a practical unity. This dynamic illustrates the transition of the subject into the object, exemplified when the Supreme Reality embodies the world, diverging from the pure self-awareness encapsulated in the phrase "I am

who I am." Then creation unfolds in three primary dimensions: the material world (*adhibhuta*), representing the physical realm; the individual souls (*adhyatma*), signifying the perceiving entities; and the transcendent presence (*adhidaiva*), which acts as a bridge between the material and the spiritual, connecting the subjective and objective realms as divine beings or psychological powers.

Within this framework, every atom is infused with the essence of the Supreme Reality, yet its finite nature precludes it from fully encompassing the entirety of this Reality. The limitations inherent in finite entities mean they can only reflect a fragment of the totality they embody. Consequently, individual beings often mistakenly attribute ultimate significance to finite things, considering them to be supreme, failing to recognize the interconnectedness of the finite things. True comprehension arises from acknowledging and understanding this interconnectedness, recognizing that while each finite element contributes to the grand tapestry of existence, the ultimate reality transcends the constraints of space and time.

yadidaṃ dṛśyate kiṃciddṛśyajātaṃ purogatam
paraṃ brahmaiva tatsarvamajarāmaramavyayam ...
yaścinmaṇiḥ prakacati pratidehasamudgake
yasminnindau sphurantyetā jagajjālamarīcayaḥ ...
camatkurvanti vastūni yadālokatayā mithaḥ
asajjātamasadyena yena satsattvamāgatam ...

Whatever is visible in the world is none other than the Supreme *Brahman*, and his imperishable and indestructible essence. [...] The Self shines as the jewel of intelligence in the human heart. And it is He from whom the radiant planets that make up the universe continually draw their radiance. [...] It is His wondrous light that projects the worlds before our curious eyes. Furthermore, from His very being derives both the reality and the unreality of all that is real and unreal. **Vasishtha Yoga 3.4.68 & 3.5.18 & 3.5.20**

nahyeṣa dūre nābhyāśe nālabhyo viṣame na ca
svānandābhāsarūpo'sau svadehādeva labhyate ...
yataḥ kālasya kalanā yato dṛśyasya dṛśyatā
mānasī kalanā yena yasya bhāsā vibhāsanam
kriyāṃ rūpaṃ rasaṃ gandhaṃ śabdaṃ sparśaṃ ca cetanam
yadvetsi tadasau devo yena vetsi tadapyasau ...
pūrṇātpūrṇaṃ prasarati saṃsthitaṃ pūrṇameva tat
ato viśvamanutpannaṃ yaccotpannaṃ tadeva tat

The Supreme is not constrained by notions of proximity or distance from us, nor can it be accessed through anything other than its own essence. It embodies the quintessence of light and joy, perceivable within our very being. [...] This Supreme Source gives rise to our perception of time and all visible phenomena, empowering the mind with the capacity to think. Its illuminating presence is what lights up the world, embodying the ultimate reality. Every form, shape, and their mechanisms, every sensory experience – be it taste, smell, sound, touch, or emotional perception – all originate from and are manifestations of the Supreme. [...] All worlds that emerge from the fullness of *Brahman* carry within them the same completeness inherent in *Brahman*. Thus, every aspect of creation, every realm and existence, mirrors the totality and perfection of *Brahman*, reflecting its unchanging and complete nature. **Vasishtha Yoga 3.6.3 & 3.9.73–74 & 3.10.29**

2. Time Consciousness of the Supramental

The way out of the mind's limited world – Pure perception as the power of extended mentality – The functioning of free mentality

"Practically, we only clearly perceive the past, the pure present is the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future."[92] Our moments of "now" are saturated with past events, merging the realms of life and death into a single, complex unity where opposites coexist. This fusion of time's facets highlights our tendency to live externally, often disconnected from our true essence. Our perception is often just a faint reflection of our authentic selves, a mere shadow cast by our experiences of duration onto the spatial canvas of the world. This results in a perception of life that is spatially oriented, externalized, and outward-facing.[93]

The self, endowed with the power of memory and consciousness, bridges past and present while projecting into the future. It binds together the disjointed, static elements of matter and the temporal segments of existence to initiate action. This synthesis of time and matter is the essence of the self's interaction with the physical world. The self inhabits a body primarily to act, manifesting a different kind of temporality compared to the inert nature of matter. Memory or consciousness acts as a link between the self and matter, exerting a unifying influence across space and time. The self, imbued with the dynamism of life, asserts its influence over the disintegrating nature of matter. Thought processes have become constrained by a concept of time that aligns with geometric precision – linear, measured, and in harmony with physical time – limiting the exploration of the soul's duration. When thought becomes ensnared in the objective and homogeneous aspects of

existence, it seeks resolution in spatial dimensions, attempting to locate the soul within the material or the corporeal. Such a pursuit often overlooks the transcendental nature of the soul, which exists beyond the confines of material time and space.[94]

Space, or the realm of expansion, arises from the unwinding of the tightly coiled fabric of duration, fragmenting into distinct moments. This process parallels the human experience of consciousness: when focused and undivided in a flow-like present, our consciousness is unified and timeless. However, as this focus dissipates, consciousness drifts from unity to diversity, from the timelessness of duration into the realm of temporal existence. In meditation and concentration, we reverse this process, moving back towards unity, away from separation, approaching the universal whole. The degree to which we relax or intensify our grip on life's rhythm influences our perception of time and space. A loosened hold allows for the emergence of distinct, isolated moments, increasing our awareness of separation and individuality. Conversely, in states of deep concentration, we perceive a unified essence within us. The intensity of our engagement with life, the tension in our grasp, thus translates into varying degrees of externalization and spatialization. Bergson notes, "The more we succeed in making ourselves conscious of our progress in pure duration, the more we feel the different parts of our being enter into each other, and our whole personality concentrate itself in a point, or rather a sharp edge, pressed against the future and cutting into it unceasingly. It is in this that life and action are free."[95] Concentration is a dynamic, ever-renewing method demanding fresh mental effort for each new challenge, steering the mind towards intuition.[96]

The primary function of reason is foresight, extracting from the material world elements that are repeatable and pre-calculable, in other words, all that is not characterized by duration. When we discuss time, we often refer to its measurement rather than to duration itself. The real self experiences subjective time, a rich tapestry of feelings and experiences beyond mere measurement. As long as the intellect fixates on prediction and calculation, focusing on the repeatable aspects of existence, it remains detached from the essence of duration, which embodies continuous, living evolution. However, by engaging deeply and consciously with duration, we immerse ourselves in our inner life, a realm of pure continuity that transcends both unity and multiplicity.

The intellect's treatment of time and space as analogous entities (with the same nature) leads to significant distortions in thinking. By conflating these fundamentally different concepts, the intellect imposes a spatial character onto time, interpreting parallel, side-by-side things as if they were sequential, one after the other. This approach obscures the true nature of time, which is a continuous flow rather than a series of discrete points. The intellect's role is to orient consciousness towards the external world, focusing on specific situations and tangible objects. In doing so, it inevitably narrows the scope of knowledge, prioritizing efficiency in action over a

comprehensive understanding of processes. The intellect seeks stability and immobility, real or perceived, and tends to fragment continuity into distinct moments. This fragmentation hampers our ability to perceive novelty or intuition. Confined within the intellect's limited range, we lack the tools to transcend this circumscribed perspective.

In the yogic tradition, profound emphasis is placed on the practice of meditation and the journey towards it, involving the withdrawal of the senses and deep concentration. This process cultivates a state of quiet, focused, yet relaxed and alert inner awareness. The primary challenge in achieving this state lies in our inexperience with creating and maintaining such a state of consciousness. To attain a centred inner awareness, it's essential to explore various levels of being, delving into the deepest layers of consciousness that go beyond our routine intellectual functions like thinking, remembering, and feeling. When one is fully immersed in this inner consciousness or the self, achieving a state of *samadhi*, the influence of the external world ceases.

Meditation serves as a refined tool for wisdom, leading to bliss, mental clarity, the evolution of consciousness, and the development of abilities that transcend the limitations of the mind. The self, in its complexity, governs every aspect of a person's being, interacting with the external world through the mind and senses, and storing these experiences in the subconscious. The complex mind, when properly trained, becomes an incredibly powerful instrument for achieving spiritual goals. It must first acknowledge the existence of a higher power or supramental upon which its functioning is based. Understanding and tapping into this deeper nature allows for the immediate rectification of any deficiencies in our current state of consciousness. Achieving purity of consciousness is crucial, involving the shedding of obstructive mental habits, fostering timely and accurate decision-making, harmonising various functions of consciousness, and eliminating ignorance. A mind that is purified, calm, and serene becomes a positive, healthy, and constructive tool. This process of mental and spiritual training, known as spiritual practice, involves harmonising and balancing mental functions and cultivating non-attachment. Such practices allow individuals to unfold their highest potential and live a life that transcends mere attachment to physical objects and transient experiences.

Meditation acts as a conduit, bridging the gap between the complex mind and the self. It facilitates self-awareness, guiding the personality towards a centred state of consciousness. During meditation, consciousness is directed to a specific direction, away from its usual, everyday course. The key is to maintain a focus that is so compelling and intrinsic that it can resist being drawn outward towards external distractions. This focus embodies a higher quality, one that is detached from external objects, allowing us to align with its source and thereby calming the fluctuations of the mind. Effective meditation demands concentration, an alert yet relaxed focus, and a mind honed to a singular point. This state of focused consciousness is often supported by awareness of breath, which acts as a bridge connecting mind and body. Breath awareness aids in regulating the mind and

facilitates the exploration of deeper planes of consciousness. To maintain stability during this process, it's also crucial to consciously manage the four fundamental instincts or drives: nutrition, sexuality, sleep, and self-preservation or defense mechanisms. Through meditation, we open ourselves to our eternal being, to freedom, and to the deeper reality of existence.[97]

To truly understand reality, we must commit to the idea that it's not the static state or the isolated moment that holds truth, but rather the flow, the change, and the continuity of existence. Reality cannot be fully comprehended through the fragmented lens of multiplicity, nor can it be understood by forcing these fragments into a contrived unity. Such an approach results in an aggregation of moments, which fails to capture the inherent unity of existence. Relying solely on the current level of reasoning can lead to contradictions, prompting further intellectual attempts to reconcile these inconsistencies. Instead, Bergson suggests, "...let us restore to movement its mobility, to change its fluidity, to time its duration. [...] Metaphysics will then become experience itself; and duration will be revealed as it really is – unceasing creation, the uninterrupted up-surge of novelty."[98]

Immersing ourselves in the flow of duration enables us to conceive what lies beyond the mind's grasp: the emergence of the novel and unpredictable, and the foundation of true freedom. Reason understands the external form of things and actions but fails to capture their internal unfolding and psychological aspects. "Radical indeed is the difference between an evolution the continuous phases of which penetrate one another by a kind of inner growth, and an unfolding whose distinct parts are placed in juxtaposition to one another."[99]

The states of the material world occur alongside the events of our consciousness. Everything incalculable or unforeseen remains a vital part of reality. Our world mirrors our inner self, where novelty continuously transform it, and by integrating with the past, alters it. In duration, there's not only the creation of reality but also the constant birth of possibilities. These two – reality and possibility – emerge simultaneously as facets of duration, which is the life force itself, creative evolution, consciousness. They are different expressions of reality's manifested nature, not different philosophical constructs. A thing and its concept, its reality, and its potential, materialize concurrently. We often perceive possibility retrospectively because we see the path taken and its outcome. Reason habitually puts these phases in a sequence, whereas, in actuality, nothing is predetermined. It's the cumulative movements that forge and advance new realities. The current logic of the intellect needs to be broadened to allow for these new perspectives to become dominant.

The totality is ever existent and unchanged, regardless of the infinite qualitative changes; it is indivisible, inseparable, and also manifold. This internal observation is often obscured by our practical life habits, but we can apprehend certain aspects of reality in their pure form, such as our personal experiences, when we detach from rigid patterns and habits. Similarly, other facets of reality

can be understood by shedding preconceived notions and attaining direct insight. Our newly formed concepts will then align more accurately with this reality. Our distorted perception of reality originates from within us, constructed by our own conceptual frameworks. Consequently, it's within our power to deconstruct and reassess it, enhancing our understanding of the world around us.[100]

If we truly understand that in manifestation everything is movement and change, and that this is the foundation, then it is stillness or immobility that must be explained. As a next step, it is stillness that must be thoroughly understood in relation to the initial state of movement. Taking movement as the basis, coming to rest is easy to understand, but can we explain movement if we take stillness as the basis? If only stillness is given, we cannot arrive at movement. In nature, this in fact arises from the relationships between movements: if everything moves at the same speed, movement itself is not perceptible, and every element appears to be immobile, giving the illusion of stillness. Bergson's states that "it is not enough to say that everything changes and moves; we must believe it. Let us assume that everything changes and moves, what will result from that proposition? The first result will be that immobility is a thing more complicated than movement. We like to say that immobility is a reality, as movement is also. We start form immobility, but if we really take seriously the proposition that everything is in movement, that everything changes, then there is no immobility."[101] For immobility to be perceived, there must be a reference point – another motion against which stillness is measured. If an observer moves in sync with an object, the object appears stationary.

Life is far richer than knowledge, and reality is far greater than the structured logic of the intellect. Thus, fully engaging with the flow of life and movement can offer deeper insights into the nature of reality. The intellect is like a prism that splits white light into colors and dissects reality into various components. While this analytical approach is valuable, it's crucial to recognize its limitations. Reassembling the dissected parts doesn't necessarily restore the original, holistic understanding of reality. Just as combining different colors doesn't recreate white light, piecing together fragments of knowledge doesn't lead to a complete understanding of the whole. What is essential for us to understand from this is that intellect is not the only, nor the highest, instrument of acquiring knowledge. As soon as we reconnect with movement, we can gain far more knowledge of reality, even if this contradicts many schools of thought and conclusions that regards a static state of consciousness as beneficial or desirable.

To summarize: duration is in fact a qualitative unity or synthesis that is self-organizing, within which both the whole and the parts can be experienced as belonging together. It continuously reads into and flows together with the past, permeating it in its entirety; it is a continuous qualitative change that, at every moment, encompasses ever greater understanding, knowledge, awareness, and

experience. Furthermore, it is a direct and immediate synthesis, since the present preserves the past and emerges from it, as if reaching forward; it is not the sum of separate moments, nor is it composed of distinct elements. Moreover, this is a passive synthesis that takes place continuously and spontaneously within consciousness.

The distinction between measurable time and duration makes it possible for us to discover within ourselves two aspects of the self, the surface self and the deeper self, and thus to better understand the two kinds of time as well. The surface self is connected to the external world and therefore relates to discontinuous, spatial things; its states are separate and can therefore be expressed in words. The deeper self consists of mutually interpenetrating psychological states, in which everything is in constant formation. The self, then, is that change which is synthesized within duration. Perceptions, sensations, emotions, and ideas also manifest themselves to us in two ways: either as sharp and precise but impersonal, or as more obscure, variable, and inexpressible, because language cannot grasp them in their process (unless it halts and fixes them). Space penetrates into the domain of pure consciousness. The significance of this also becomes evident in relation to freedom, for action is freer the more it originates from the deeper self. Thus, the difference lies in the degree: space and duration are different in nature, yet in our experience they are connected through this degree.[102]

Sri Aurobindo's exploration of supramental perception, particularly in relation to time consciousness, offers profound insights into the interplay between the temporal and the timeless aspects of existence. His exposition reveals that all existence and consciousness oscillate between two fundamental states: the timeless Infinite and the self-manifesting Infinite that orchestrates all within the realm of time. Viewed through knowledge beyond the mind, these are simultaneously existing and parallel states and movements of the truth of the Infinite. In the reality of its timeless existence, the timeless Infinite holds everything that manifests in time. Its consciousness of time is itself infinite: it sees at once the whole and the parts, the changing succession or momentary vision, and the fixed, total mode of vision that appears to us as the past, present, and future of things. We can gain insight into the consciousness of the timeless Infinite in such a way that, through reflection and impression, it is cast upon our mentality. Entering into the realm of timelessness necessitates an expansion or dissolution into the Infinite, transcending the limitations of physical space and temporal identity. When an individual's consciousness is primarily focused on time-bound perceptions, it becomes challenging to establish a profound connection with the seamless blend of the timeless and temporal realms. This time-bound mindset limits the ability to act from a place of infinite potential and exercise free will uninhibited by temporal constraints. As a result, mental consciousness often succumbs to the automatic processes of nature, driven by past impulses and ingrained habits. This reliance on pre-existing patterns restricts the ability to tap into the boundless, indefinite realm of the Infinite, where time is not a limiting factor but an integrated aspect of a larger, more holistic existence.

Supramental consciousness is anchored in the supreme essence of the timeless Infinite and harnesses infinite energy within the temporal domain. It manifests within the sphere of time while maintaining the timeless Infinite as its foundational backdrop. This allows for a unique existence that spans both the timeless and temporal dimensions, perceiving them as unified aspects of the same Infinite reality. Such consciousness is not swayed by the transient flow of moments, nor does it fixate on each passing instance. Instead, it is grounded in an eternal identity that transcends temporal flux. This entity, in contrast to the mental being, exhibits the following characteristics:

- It is not swayed or overwhelmed by the ongoing flow of moments. Rather than focusing on each transient moment, it is anchored in an eternal identity that transcends the fluctuations of time.
- It exists in a state where the distinctions of past, present, and future merge. In this realm, all temporal phases coalesce, existing concurrently within the essence and energy of the eternal self.
- It perceives the triad of past, present, and future not as separate segments, but as a single, continuous movement, and as an indivisible whole, maintaining its unity throughout the various stages, periods, and cycles of existence.
- While it views time as an integrated entity, this entity is also deeply aware of the incremental development of moments, recognizing and appreciating the gradual progression and evolution within the fabric of time.[103]

IV. Human Being

1. The Self-Transcending Being

Consciousness/mentality becomes free in the human being – Planes of existence, or surface self and deep self – The aim of material life is survival – Mental life dreams of perfection – Spiritual life is a reflection of the absolute

As we have already mentioned, mind and intellect first become free in the human being. According to Bergson, this gives us the possibility to consciously step back into "duration", the genuine current of life and vital impulse. Let us now review the human being by drawing on the topics already discussed, interpreting and relating them to ourselves, so that we may better understand our situation and our true purpose. In the human being, every experience, event, every feeling, thought, and act of will is preserved. The greatest part of these never becomes conscious, because certain functions of the mind filter them, allowing only those to come into effect that are useful in the given situation. These help us decide and act, but nothing more really becomes conscious in us. But then, when does the full content of our conscious being assert itself, if not in the present situation? Even though only a small part of it appears in our thinking, it can be recognized as a disposition in what we desire, what we fear, and what and how we act. In reality, often operating below the level of conscious thought, it becomes part of our character, and thus of our destiny.

In Bergson's concept of duration, the past is not static but dynamically influences the present, contributing to the ongoing development of our personality. Since duration is continuously growing, the past preserves itself automatically, and memory constantly pushes something from this growing past into the present; thus our personality ripens unceasingly. Every moment is new and unforeseeable, and our states are merely moments of this continuous unfolding. Within duration, the phenomena of our constantly changing inner life are all contained and ordered into a unity. Every moment is an original moment of an original story. We are the masters, the creators of these moments. What we do depends on what we are (the past), yet we are what we do (the present), and we continuously create ourselves (the future). The conscious being changes, grows, develops, and creates itself without limit. And is this not precisely what characterizes existence as a whole as well? [104]

The Vedic tradition views the human being as a complex entity capable of self-realization, encompassing various planes of existence. This perspective helps in understanding the multifaceted nature of human functioning, potential, and the challenges encountered. The tradition emphasizes the fluidity between the inner and outer worlds; the inner experiences can profoundly influence

external reality, and external circumstances can, in turn, surrender to the inner spiritual states. In other words, the higher consciousness descends to the lower, while the lower can rise to the higher. Central to this perspective is the concept of *karma*, the cycle of action and its consequences, which forms the bedrock of worldly existence and embodiment. Actions leave imprints in the depths of consciousness, potentially sprouting under conducive conditions. These imprints can either hinder or advance spiritual growth, but either way, they are a part of the evolution of consciousness. It is important to note that *karma* is not static; it is a dynamic force. As such, when karmic patterns are transcended or fully understood, they can prompt an immediate shift in consciousness, with novel manifestations even extending to the physical realm.

In yoga philosophy, the emphasis is on actions that are devoid of self-interest. Such actions do not create new karmic imprints. Instead, they serve to cleanse the individual of past karmas. Essential to this process is the practice of offering, which is much less about the ritual itself and much more about a conscious recognition of our origins, the source of all that we have received, and an offering of our entire being – our lives, love, knowledge, and actions – to the manifestation of Reality in its entirety.

Bergson distinguishes between two realms of human experience: the external life and the internal life, corresponding to objective and subjective time. The internal life resides in the world of the deep self, a realm completely internal, where psychic phenomena interpenetrate and constantly alter their quality. This internal world does not seek to objectify experiences logically or verbally because its phenomena are fluid and ever-changing. Directly engaging with this inner life allows a more profound connection with reality. Contrastingly, the external life is the domain of the surface being, shaped by societal influences and the need to articulate and divide the inner experience. This is driven by evolutionary "utilitarianism," as this divided self adapts more effectively to the external world. The external life acts as a veneer over the real self, serving as its projection or shadow, and often obstructing direct access to the inner realm. Spiritual phenomena in this external realm can only have an effect through symbols and signs.

Bergson views duration as the time of the soul, representing creative time that, when interpreted through external life, becomes space. This transformation is at the root of many philosophical dilemmas. The societal emphasis on utility and external connection makes transcending this spatial view (thus moving beyond intellect or language) challenging. This thinking fails to differentiate between the deeper and more superficial aspects of the self, often prioritizing the superficial due to its perceived utility. Hence, there are two types of perception: one that is precise but impersonal, associated with the external life; and another that is dynamic and inexpressible, rooted in the internal life.[105]

The intellect, in its attempt to understand the complex, indeterminate processes of the deep self, resorts to compartmentalization and simplification, representing these processes through symbols. This intellectual approach assumes that emotions and inner experiences are clear-cut, bounded, and follow a linear succession, thus establishing causal relationships and stripping away their inherent novelty and unpredictability. Consequently, emotions, which are inherently vibrant, evolving, and impactful, are reduced to static feelings and impersonal, collective impressions as they are expressed in words. However, true emotion is a dynamic entity that profoundly influences us and guides our decisions and actions. In reality, our inner life resembles the unfolding of a melody, marked by continuous qualitative development and simultaneity.

As we have seen, Bergson approaches the processes of the psyche or psychology from the standpoint of duration, and he recognized that the intellect structures and differentiates reality according to its own needs. It spatializes time and defines differences of degree where the nature of things already differs in kind. This results in entirely different things being placed into the same category, so that the soul and its activity come to resemble matter and its functioning. Principles that apply to matter were thus automatically extended to psychic phenomena as well, even though in reality they concern only the surface self. The phenomena of the deeper self are expressed through this surface self, yet in truth they form a unity. The intellect therefore examines only appearances when it attempts to measure how much cause produces how much effect—that is, how much reaction. This is a measure of intensity, not of the quality of sensation or experience. "... every sensation is modified when it is repeated; and if it seems to me not to change from one day to the next, this is because I now apprehend it through the object that causes it, through the word that expresses it. The influence of language upon sensation is deeper than is generally supposed. Language not only persuades us of the invariability of our sensations, but sometimes even misleads us regarding the very nature and quality of the sensation experienced." [106]

Attempting to capture our unique and subjective feelings using universal language often leads to a distortion of the actual experience. We tend to solidify our impressions to express them in language, conflating the fluid and evolving nature of our emotions with their more tangible external representations, particularly the words we use. This process touches only upon the surface self, a mere shadow or material imitation of the real self, hence language can distort the experience of reality. Bergson notes, "...our outer and, so to speak, social life is more practically important to us than our inner and individual existence. We instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language. Hence the confuse of the emotion itself, which is in perpetual state of becoming, with its permanent external object, and especially with the word which expresses this object."[107] To truly know the real self and directly experience reality, intuition is required, a faculty often relegated to the background by our practical approach to life. Intuition allows us to formulate

and express reality in a way that frees the soul from the constraints of limiting concepts. However, our intellect tends to impoverish reality by seeking to perceive it as pre-existing, rather than continuously approaching its essence.[108]

"When we follow the movement of our nature, we think in order to act. We should therefore not be surprised that the habits of action leave their imprint on the habits of representation, and that our mind always apprehends things in the order in which we are accustomed to conceiving them when we intend to act upon them. It is indisputable that the point of departure of all human action is some form of dissatisfaction and, consequently, a sense of lack. Human beings would not act if they did not set themselves a goal; they search only because they are in want. Thus our action proceeds from 'nothing' toward 'something,' and its essence consists in embroidering 'something' onto the canvas of 'nothing.' In truth, nothingness is not so much the absence of a thing as it is the absence of usefulness."[109] Action is therefore an extraordinarily important moment in human life, because it is in action that the entire psychic world is expressed: every sensation, act of will, and thought converges toward a single point. Its source is memory, as in, consciousness, and the genuine knowledge that arises from it reaches us through identification, that is, through intuition. But when one formulates what one is doing, it becomes perception, identifies with matter, and takes on a formal character, yet this creates nothing and explains nothing. Between these two lies the nervous system as the connecting link: the vital plane, the life force, which is movement. Within this, however, there is no continuity, whereas perception or lived experience is continuous and becomes articulated only afterward, in the course of interpretation.

Our inability to remember everything or be aware of all aspects of our existence is largely due to the intellect's selective process, which prioritizes what is necessary for external life. This selective focus obstructs our perception of the constant changes occurring within our deeper self. The intellect and senses are attuned to the development of matter, recording it in their perception. Valéria Dienes, reflecting on this, notes, "The intellect thus erects an intellectual edifice over the original, intuitive identification, which is in itself inexpressible, capable only of being lived through, in which it places its instruments of action."[110] The deep self is remarkable for its ability to integrate all experiences, lending coherence and meaning to the multifaceted existence that characterizes human life. During the cognitive process, our entire being is engaged, not just in a simple stimulus-response mechanism. Consciousness doesn't operate as a fixed centre but more like a dynamic centralization – an island emerging in the ocean of the unconscious, becoming more apparent when routine movements are interrupted and the dominance of the intellect is paused.

If perception is essentially a selection from pre-existing memories, then consciousness fluctuates between waking and dreaming states. It extracts from the unconscious those

experiences that can contribute to the required action at a given moment. Therefore, it's continually organizing these raw materials to find appropriate responses. This constant organization makes it challenging to accommodate anything new, as the new doesn't fit within the framework of already established elements. To allow for novelty, the mind must either switch off or expand, stepping beyond its usual confines and fixed elements.[111]

The exploration of life organized around different planes of the complex being – material, mental, and spiritual – reveals distinct purposes and modes of existence at each level. In material life, centred around the physical body and the life-force, the primary aim is to fulfil nature's vital purpose: the sustenance and enjoyment of life. This encompasses the quest for comfort, pleasure, and survival, both of the individual and the species. Life on the material plane is fundamentally concerned with the tangible aspects of existence, including the family, society, and national order. It is characterized by a certain narrow-mindedness and conservatism, where routine and established thought patterns prevail. While past changes driven by progressive minds are eventually assimilated, present reforms are often resisted. Spirituality, in this realm, is typically limited to what has been integrated into the social structure, often represented by religious institutions. Historically, true spiritual freedom was sought outside societal bounds, like in monastic life, to prevent the disturbance of established social structures.

Two main approaches have emerged to facilitate the evolution of matter-focused humans:

- Progress and change as a law of life (Western approach): This approach emphasizes the mind's triumph over matter, advocating for progress and conscious change as inherent aspects of life. It has led to significant advancements in the physical and external world. However, this relentless pursuit often results in physical exhaustion and stagnation, as physical nature inherently resists rapid transformation.
- Moderate spirituality infused into daily life (Eastern approach): Here, a moderate level of spirituality is achieved by infusing a religious spirit into institutions and daily activities, allowing the spirit to triumph over matter. This approach has led to a form of spirituality that, while pervasive, tends to be superficial. Profound spiritual experiences often occur outside the social framework, either leading to societal disconnection for the individuals who experience them or causing temporary disruptions in social order when such experiences become widespread.

Both these solutions have their strengths and limitations. The Western model fosters external, tangible progress but can neglect the inner, spiritual development. In contrast, the Eastern model

integrates spirituality into everyday life but risks maintaining only a surface-level engagement with deeper spiritual truths. The interplay between mental and spiritual efforts highlights the complexity of transcending the limitations imposed by material nature. Neither mental nor spiritual endeavours alone are sufficient; a synergistic approach is necessary where both aspects complement and support each other.

The mental life, with its inherent idealism, seeks perfection through moral, perceptual, and intellectual pursuits. This realm is characterized by an aspirational and visionary nature. The "mental self" can be likened to an eternal dreamer, inhabiting a realm of subtle realities and ideals, functioning independently of physical constraints and external stimuli. It operates within a subtle-physical body, akin to a state of dreaming, where it perceives and interacts with inner objects of consciousness. This mental domain is illuminated by the nature of light, representing clarity, insight, and understanding. However, the mental realm's inherent flaw lies in its struggle to effectively confront and transform the resistance presented by material nature. Despite aspiring for ideals of truth, beauty, and other lofty goals, the mental self often retreats in the face of the harsh realities and rigid constraints of the physical world. This retreat into a world of ideals, while providing a refuge, also leads to a form of escapism where the mental self is forced to reconcile with a "grey reality" – a world that falls short of its envisioned perfection.

jāgaritasthāno bahiṣprajñaḥ saptāṅga ekonaviṃśatimukhaḥ
sthūlabhugvaiśvānaraḥ prathamaḥ pādaḥ
svapna-sthāno antah-prajñaḥ saptānga ekona-viṁśati-mukhaḥ
pravivikta-bhuk taijaso dvitīyaḥ pādāḥ

The first aspect of the real self (*Atman*) is *vaishvanara*, representing the waking or external state of consciousness. This aspect is characterized by seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and it enjoys gross material objects. The second aspect is *taijasa*, which corresponds to the dream state or inner state of consciousness. Like *vaishvanara*, *taijasa* also has seven limbs and nineteen mouths, but it is engaged with the enjoyment of subtle-physical objects and mental impressions. **Mandukya Upanishad 3–4**

When there is a significant gap between external life and the inner nature of the thinker, the mind often retreats from the life-force to operate more freely within its own realm. This is evident in the poet absorbed in visions, the artist immersed in creative work, the philosopher engrossed in contemplation, and the scientist focused on research. However, the mind truly realizes its full potential and purpose when it engages with the life-force, embracing its possibilities and confronting its challenges. In this interaction, personality gains sharper definition: art becomes more

dynamic, abstract thoughts acquire practical significance, philosophical generalizations are anchored in scientific evidence and lived experience. Nonetheless, the mind's power remains constrained if it is selfishly tied to the life-force, detached from material reality, or indifferent to human progress. Its fulfilment lies in striving to elevate human nature, bringing it closer to the soul's essential reality. The mind's endeavour to uplift life is invariably supported by something beyond itself, the source of all its strength and capabilities. Spiritual existence, while aligned with the eternal, does not disregard the transient. It harbors the mind's aspirations such as:

- The perfect beauty and eternal joy, independent of external factors and consistent across varying phenomena.
- The ultimate truth is manifested in the supreme, unchanging Reality, which, paradoxically, underlies all change and progression.
- The ideal act is the realization of an omnipotent, self-regulating principle that pervades all and is reflected in the rhythm of the cosmos.

For those who achieve unity with their true self (*Atman*), the continuous, creative activity of this self becomes their lived reality. However, maintaining spiritual existence proves challenging in the external world often devoid of truth, love, beauty, and order. Consequently, mystic saints may often withdraw from material life, perceiving it as incongruent with their spiritual values. Such retreat might be an acknowledgment of a higher reality, transcending personal ideals. Yet, the influence of spiritual forces in the material world cannot be completely negated, leading some to reengage with the material realm, utilizing it as a means to attain a more holistic self-realization. In this journey, dualities are cast aside. The seekers strive to discern the divine in all things, pursuing eternal truths, beauty, love, and joy. This approach stems from the understanding that the real self is inherent in everything; everything exists within the self, and all of existence is a manifestation of the self.

yatra supto na kan cana kāman kāmayate na kancana
svapnaṁ pasyati tat suṣuptam
suṣupta-sthāna ekibhutah prajñāna-ghana evānanda
mayo hyānanda-bhuk cetomukhah prājñas tritiyah pādāḥ
esa sarveśvara esa sarvajña eso antaryāmy esa yonih
sarvasya prabhavāpyayau hi bhutānām

In the state of deep sleep consciousness, known as *sushupti*, a person transcends the desire for sensory objects and the realm of dreams. This state is characterized by the presence of *prajna*, or intuitive knowledge, where all experiences merge into a unified, indistinguishable whole. This profound level of consciousness is marked by the enjoyment of pure, unadulterated bliss, illuminated by the light of wisdom. This realm of consciousness (also referred to as conscious deep sleep) represents the third aspect or leg of the self. It is the Lord of all, possessing omniscience and functioning as the innermost controller. It is both the origin and the culmination of all beings, underscoring its significance as a fundamental aspect of existence. **Mandukya Upanishad 5–6**

yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmany evānupaśyati
sarva-bhūteṣu cātmānaṁ tato na vijugupsate

One who sees all beings in the Supreme Self (*Atman*), and who sees the Self in all living beings, never hates anyone or anything. **Ishavasya Upanishad 6**

sa vā eṣa mahānaja ātmā yo'yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu ya eṣo'ntarhṛdaya ākāśastasmiñchete,
sarvasya vaśī sarvasyeśānaḥ sarvasyādhipatiḥ; sa na sādhunā karmaṇā bhūyān, no evāsādhunā
kanīyān; eṣa sarveśvaraḥ; eṣa bhūtādhipatiḥ, eṣa bhūtapālaḥ, eṣa seturvidharaṇa eṣāṃ
lokānāmasaṃbhedāya; tametaṃ vedānuvacanena brāhmaṇā
vividiṣanti yajñena dānena tapasā'nāśakena;
etameva viditvā munirbhavati ...
sa eṣa neti netyātmā, agṛhyo nahi gṛhyate, aśīryo nahi śīryate, asaṅgo nahi sajyate, asito na
vyathate, na riṣyati; etamu haivaite na tarata iti -
ataḥ pāpamakaravamiti, ataḥ kalyāṇamakaravamiti;
ubhe u haivaiṣa ete tarati, nainaṃ kṛtākṛte tapataḥ

The infinite and unborn *Atman*, initially perceived as a living entity, is mirrored in the intellect, mind, and senses, residing within the heart's inner space as the Supreme Self. This entity reigns supreme as the ultimate ruler and guide, unaffected by human deeds, whether virtuous or sinful. As the sovereign lord of all and the foundation of life, it marks the divide between different realms. Scholars of the *Vedas*, along with those who engage in sacrificial rites and offerings, seek to comprehend this Self, aiming to transcend mortality. However, true understanding is reserved for those who engage in deep contemplation. [...] The nature of the Self defies simple categorization as 'this' or 'that.' It exists beyond the grasp of ordinary perception, untouched and unaltered by worldly disturbances or physical contact. Its essence is limitless, devoid of suffering and desire. This Self transcends dualistic notions of sin and virtue, and hence the aspirant can't reach it with

a dualistic thinking. The Self exists in a realm far beyond these binary concepts, impervious to the impacts of moral judgements. **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.22 (excerpt)**

Spiritual existence can indeed navigate external existence solely for individual purposes, sometimes indifferent to the upliftment of the broader world. In such cases, this spiritual life might passively accept any environment and activity, retreating once its higher objectives are achieved. Alternatively, it could express itself through benevolent actions, service, compassion, and knowledge sharing, yet without any intent to transform the world fundamentally. Since creation is inherently conscious, evolution becomes a vital aspect of worldly existence. The true essence of nature lies in the gradual unveiling of the Divine. This perspective allows for the shaping of material life into forms more befitting the real self, creating vessels better aligned with the Divine essence.

Understanding this, it becomes apparent why neither the Western approach, balancing matter and mind, nor the Eastern method, balancing matter and soul, is fully satisfactory. The exclusion of the evolving mind has had profound consequences. It led to a renunciation of the broader development of society, granting it a religious facade but devoid of deeper meaning. While this approach may have secured the right to spiritual development as a primary human pursuit, it left society with a hollow reminder of spirituality without substantive impact. Similarly, material life, relinquished to ignorance, became ensnared in a purposeless duality, where escape appeared as the only solution. Many yogic schools also adopted this compromise by prioritizing individual perfection or liberation. This often entailed a detachment from worldly activities and a withdrawal from life. Consequently, the drive for growth in the material realm diminished, while spirituality, though preserving its essence in isolation, forfeited its potency and relevance to the world at large.[112]

The ancient Vedic tradition illuminates a profound understanding of human existence, focusing on the interplay of light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance. It suggests that certain forces of ignorance strive to keep us in darkness, restricting and obscuring the light of truth. This is mirrored in our daily experiences when the mind, life-force, and body, following their impulses, fears, and desires, diverge from the path of truth and reality. Such divergence leads to the scattering of human strength, attention, and time. To counter this, the Vedic tradition emphasizes the cultivation of psychic forces, also considered as deities, within our mortal being. These forces are seen as essential to bring forth the fruits of our sacrifices, such as spiritual progress, and fulfilment. Regular invocation of these forces supports our journey towards the soul or the Absolute, which are one, aiding in the unfolding of the inner light. The physical being can transcend its limitations through the descent of forces that originate from higher planes, like knowledge and truth. This transcendence allows for the breaking of limitations, opening up to and receiving the truth, and

holding it in all aspects of one's being. This process signifies the growth of immortality within us, as we increasingly align our thoughts, vision, and actions with truth. Darkness, or the night, symbolizes the periods when consciousness is confined within the unconscious. Releasing consciousness signifies the advent of light, day, dawn, and the rising sun, symbolizing enlightenment and awareness.

Moreover, the Vedic perspective on human life can be understood through the lens of action, involving three elements: the master, the doer, and the instrument. Understanding these elements within oneself unveils the secret of action and its inherent joy. Misinterpretation or confusion of these roles often leads to repetitive cycles of learning and reforming until proper alignment is achieved. The human being is an instrument of the Supreme, and realizing this helps in acknowledging the Master. The external being, often mistaken as the self, is merely an instrument and not the doer or master. Surrendering as a tool to the Absolute, and aligning with nature's purpose, enhances the perfection of one's functioning. This surrender is not only a source of joy in itself but also enables the discovery of joy in all things. It is through this process that nature transforms the raw components of mind, life-force, and matter into a fully conscious being.

Then the conscious human being or its intrinsic nature is recognized as an agent that transcends individuality and limitations. This agent is the creative force behind all existence, embodying consciousness, infinite power, and a multitude of qualities. To fully embrace this understanding, one must relinquish identification with the body, mind, and life-force, and instead cultivate a sense of unity with everything and everyone across all of time – past, present, and future. The joy of the doer is derived from the outcome of the action, and from the joy of the real self for whom the action is performed. As the human being is a manifestation of both the infinite and the finite aspects of the real self. The distinction between the doer and the master is critical. While the agent or the person is finite and the doer is universal with a personal orientation, neither of them is the master or the true Person. The misidentification of the doer with the master can lead to an incomplete understanding of action and its perfection.

The culmination of this journey is the realization that we are, in essence, the master. This realization doesn't involve shaping or defining the self in qualitative terms but rather embodying and fulfilling it in our very being, life, body, and mind. In this state, the true Person emerges – a presence that is simultaneously us and beyond us, encompassing all others and transcending them, orchestrating the dance of the universe while maintaining an intimate connection within the silent inner chamber of our soul. This realization brings the joy of the master, where there is no further need for action. It bestows upon us the gift of itself, along with the entirety of existence and the shared and unshared joys of all creatures. In our being, we encompass both ourselves and all else,

transcending the dichotomy of self and other. This state represents the ultimate fulfilment of creation, where the individual self realizes its oneness with the universal essence.[113]

2. Fulfilling the Purpose of Life

The manifestation of the absolute in the world – The essence, necessity, logic and purpose of rebirth

Henri Bergson posits that the true essence of the self is awakened through the efforts that genuinely express it. This notion aligns with his perspective on the dynamic, evolutionary process of life, where the inherent intentions of the true self or soul manifest through the body-mind complex. Thus, transcendence is an integral aspect of human existence. Human beings and the world are deeply interconnected, reflecting a harmonious dance of macrocosmic (universal) and microcosmic (individual) creative evolution. This idea resonates with ancient philosophical thought, which emphasizes the eternal interconnection, interaction, and interpenetration of individuals and the cosmos. The transformation of the world is a natural consequence of personal evolution and development. As individuals progress, the world around them transforms in response to this interaction. In considering the being from which all existence flows, Bergson suggests moving beyond the limited perspective of the individual self. This broader reality encompasses the finite self, opening the way to a view of the infinite as a creative, evolving narrative. In this narrative, various forms and species play the role of protagonists, driven by the vital impulse that organizes matter and fosters increasingly more free forms of life. This impulse is evident in the development of the nervous system, enabling movement and choice, culminating in the human brain, which provides the means for self-consciousness and true freedom.

This evolutionary process is ongoing, suggesting that humans have the potential to become entirely independent of material constraints in their ultimate state of development. Throughout history, certain individuals have achieved profound contemplative insights, directly experiencing the real self and the inner meaning of all things. They have understood the relationship between the self and the divine, recognizing all forms of life as interconnected and embodying the original creative will. Bergson's philosophy thus portrays a continual upward journey through and within humanity, where individual development contributes to and reflects the broader evolutionary trajectory of life itself.[114]

According to Bergson, life in its unmanifested state is essentially memory, consciousness, and freedom in a virtual or potential form. It is within and through the human experience that these aspects of life become actualized, transforming potentiality into reality. In this context, Bergson views the human being as a critical juncture in the evolutionary process, capable of accessing and manifesting all levels of existence that coexist in the unmanifest whole. Humans represent a unique point in evolution where the manifest becomes a true reflection of the unmanifest. Through this, individuals have the potential to unite the forms of nature and transcend their current limitations, thereby expressing the creative essence of life. This understanding posits the human experience as a gateway to freedom from the constraints of matter, where life-force creates a means of liberation.[115]

Bergson's research led him to recognize that mental activity extends beyond mere brain function. He identified the brain as a storehouse of habits rather than memories, and he argued that the functions of thinking are independent of the brain. This perspective suggests that after the physical body dissolves, the essence or personality of an individual is likely to be preserved, transcending physical limitations. Consciousness is honed and refined as it interacts with matter, preparing for a more intensified and vibrant form of existence. This advanced state of life is characterized by effort, innovation, and creative evolution. The extent and quality of effort exerted by individuals determine their elevation to this higher state of being. The realms beyond conscious beings may be hidden or yet undiscovered, but they are intrinsically close and waiting to be uncovered. Bergson advocates for an introspective journey, where retracing the thread of manifestation backward can deepen one’s understanding of their own being. This journey involves intuition and inner contemplation, allowing individuals to experience the deeper truths of existence personally.[116]

The science of yoga presents a concept of subjective evolution, where consciousness progressively evolves, allowing the real self to express itself at increasingly higher levels through different entities. This perspective acknowledges that the full development and transcendence of the self cannot be achieved within a single, limited lifespan. Instead, it's a continuous journey, spanning multiple incarnations, each contributing to the growth and evolution of the self. At the core of this process is the subtle physical body, which is organized around the soul and serves as the inner sense or mind. This deep mind acts as a repository, storing fragments of feelings, thoughts, and experiences from past lives. These imprints manifest as tendencies shaping one's personality and, consequently, one's destiny. Since these stored imprints are dynamic and malleable, transforming one's personality and tendencies can modify, overwrite, and enrich them, leading to an evolving destiny.

The system of subtle physical instruments operates through gross physical instruments like the brain, nervous system, and sensory organs, allowing interaction with the external world. As consciousness evolves within a lifetime, so do these subtle and gross physical instruments, as well as the external environment. This evolution is driven by consciousness exerting pressure on matter and

nature, compelling them to evolve to allow for a fuller manifestation and expression of the self. This process can lead to the development of supernatural powers and the refinement of the senses and mind. These abilities, however, are inherent faculties of the self and are more aptly termed supramental rather than supernatural. Our current ordinary, limited mind creates a barrier to accessing these higher, more expansive functions. Yet, the yoga tradition teaches that it's possible to attain a transcendent plane of consciousness in this very life, on this Earth. Similar to how the vital plane, with its instinct and movement, pre-existed its manifestation in matter, and the mind and intellect were present before their emergence from the vital plane, the supramental consciousness – characterized by intuition and gnosis – already permeates our current plane of existence. It exists within us and is accessible, awaiting our realization and engagement with it to unfold its potential.

Our spiritual or psychic existence can be likened to an ongoing narrative that has persisted since the dawn of consciousness, uninterrupted and continuous. This narrative encompasses the entirety of our past, which still exists within us in a subconscious state. The past is not lost; it merely lies veiled, waiting to be uncovered and integrated into our conscious awareness. This hidden dimension of ourselves contains the essence of our true self. The brain, or mind, acts as a filter, focusing our attention on the present and future, drawing upon the past only as it serves to prepare for what lies ahead. For the mind, life is about concentrating on immediate actions, allowing only the elements of consciousness that are relevant to the present situation to come forth while relegating the rest to the background. This selective process masks the vast expanse of our past experiences, extracting and externalizing only what can be manifested in physical movement. This mechanism creates a mechanical framework for our actions, constricting our broader vision but enhancing the effectiveness of our actions in the material world.

The real self, however, transcends the limitations of the brain, extending in all directions beyond mere physical existence. The brain's activity is responsive to only a fraction of the mental life, suggesting that mental life is not merely a consequence of physical existence. Instead, the body is utilized by the real self as an instrument, implying that the body and the self are not inseparably unified. According to Bergson's perspective the immortality of the real self cannot be conclusively proven within the confines of our limited experiential timeframe, its continued existence beyond our current physical life is highly plausible. The fate of the soul, therefore, is not as enigmatic as it may seem; consciousness – encompassing feelings, thoughts, and will – is not inextricably tied to the physical brain.[117]

In the context of yoga, there is a detailed exploration of the inherent nature of the real self or soul. This understanding lays the groundwork for discussions on reincarnation and the ongoing process of subjective, conscious evolution across multiple lifetimes.

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre
vedāvināśinaṁ nityaṁ ya enam ajam avyayam
kathaṁ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha kaṁ ghātayati hanti kam
vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro 'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī
nainaṁ chindanti śastrāṇi nainaṁ dahati pāvakaḥ
na cainaṁ kledayanty āpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ
acchedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam akledyo 'śoṣya eva ca
nityaḥ sarva-gataḥ sthāṇur acalo 'yaṁ sanātanaḥ

The true self, or *Atman*, knows neither birth nor death; having once existed, it can never cease to be. It is without beginning, unborn, eternal, and ancient; even when the body is slain, the soul itself is not slain. How could one who knows the soul to be indestructible, unborn, eternal, and unchanging be a killer, or cause anyone else to kill? Just as a person casts off worn-out and useless garments and puts on new ones, so too does the embodied soul abandon old and unserviceable bodies and take on new ones in their place. No weapon can cut or pierce the soul; fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it. The soul is unbreakable and insoluble; it cannot be burned or dried; it is imperishable, all-pervading, unmoving, steadfast, and eternally the same. **Bhagavad Gita 2.20–24**

avyakto 'yam acintyo 'yam avikāryo 'yam ucyate
tasmād evaṁ viditvainaṁ nānuśocitum arhasi
atha cainaṁ nitya-jātaṁ nityaṁ vā manyase mṛtam
tathāpi tvaṁ mahā-bāho nainaṁ śocitum arhasi
jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca
tasmād aparihārye 'rthe na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi
avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyakta-madhyāni bhārata
avyakta-nidhanāny eva tatra kā paridevanā

The soul is spoken of in the ancient scriptures as unmanifest, inconceivable, and unchanging; knowing this, you should not grieve. But even if you were to think of it as continually being born and dying, even then there would be no cause for sorrow. For to one who is born, death is certain, and rebirth after death is equally certain; therefore, you should not grieve over what is inevitable. At the beginning of creation all beings are unmanifest; in the middle they become manifest, and at the

dissolution of creation they become unmanifest once again. What cause, then, do you have for sorrow? **Bhagavad Gita 2.25–28**

nehābhikrama-nāśo 'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate
sv-alpam apy asya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt
vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana
bahu-śākhā hy anantāś ca buddhayo 'vyavasāyinām

In yoga, even the slightest progress is never in vain; there is no loss or diminishment. Even a small step forward made on this path, protects a person from the most dangerous kind of fear, the fear of death. The concentrated and steadfast intellect is one-pointed; the irresolute, by contrast, have an intellect endlessly scattered. **Bhagavad Gita 2.40–41**

Sri Aurobindo, in his work *The Problem of Rebirth*, delves into the complexities surrounding the concept of reincarnation, particularly addressing the sceptical perspective of the modern, scientifically-oriented mind. He points out that the prevailing scientific methods and worldview, which focus predominantly on the tangible and observable physical plane, are inherently limited when it comes to understanding or validating concepts like rebirth – science cannot definitively prove or disprove the concept of rebirth. This limitation stems from science's general lack of acknowledgment of the soul and its journey beyond physical existence. Modern thinking is ineffective in finding the truth. The memory that we commonly experience in our daily lives operates at a basic level, primarily recalling recent events and significant highlights, without fully encompassing the totality of even our present existence. However, he suggests that it's possible to access memories of past lives. This deeper recall is rooted in what he refers to as "psychic memory", which is closely connected to the soul and involves unlocking imprints stored in the subtle physical being.

Rebirth is essential in the evolutionary journey of consciousness as it seeks to break through its material constraints and gradually come into its own true nature. This concept of reincarnation offers explanations for various human phenomena that cannot be accounted for by genetics or environment alone, such as innate talents, exceptional abilities, and certain higher psychological experiences. Furthermore, the journey of the self through multiple incarnations is driven by a quest for divine qualities, that is, inherent qualities of the soul, our true self – knowledge, power, love, and purity. The pursuit and attainment of these qualities have their own rewards:

- The capacity for love and the experience of joy in love expands, ultimately leading to the all-encompassing happiness and ecstasy of the self.
- The pursuit of knowledge is a movement towards infinite light and the intuitive understanding of all.
- Gaining divine power and continuously receiving more of this divine strength and capacity.
- The attainment of purity involves transcending our egoistic self and entering a state of immaculate expansiveness where all distinctions dissolve into divine oneness and unity.

All experiences, be they of suffering or happiness, serve as instruments for the growth and development of the evolving self. They provide assistance, discipline, and challenges that contribute to the self's maturation. Over time, we come to understand our true nature as eternal and unchanging entities, gaining awareness of our immortality and perpetual evolution. This realization brings to light the past states that have shaped our current existence, offering us insights into the trajectory of our evolution. In this context, the self's perception and memory do not require external validation for concepts such as rebirth or immortality; these truths become self-evident, akin to physical events, and the understanding of reincarnation transforms into an intrinsic and dynamic knowledge.[118]

Our thinking is often more adept when dealing with tangible, physical entities, as the subtleties of less concrete concepts demand a greater effort to comprehend thoroughly. Moreover, what is frequently considered thinking is merely the uncritical acceptance of pre-existing ideas. The concept of rebirth appeals to many due to the persistence of personality traits and the belief in the survival or recurrence of mental, neural, and physical components post-death. In contrast, ancient philosophers recognized that personality is a fluid and evolving amalgamation, continually regenerated in bodies shaped by nature's constant flux.

Beyond this transient personality lies a more profound sense of self, a continuity whose essence can be explored and understood. This deeper identity is the real Self or true Person, the orchestrator of nature's ceaseless dynamics. The key to comprehending immortality lies in transcending the ever-changing personality and connecting with this immutable Person. Unlike the physical body, which is a creation of the Self and exists within it, the real Self is unchanging, omnipresent, and ever-existent. The ego, or sense of individuality, is a reflection of the real Self as it interacts with and is mirrored in the mind. This mental being or mental consciousness enables us to perceive a temporal identity, contrasting with the timelessness of the Self. It allows us to be impacted by experiences through the ego, maintaining control over the mind, life-force, and body. Notably, this mental

entity differs from the ever-changing personality; the personality is complex, continuously evolving, and within it, each aspect or plane (physical, nervous, mental, etc.) possesses its distinct persona.

The personality represents the surface aspect of our being, underpinned by a rich tapestry of past experiences that remain inaccessible to our physical memory. This arrangement ensures that the burden of our history doesn't overwhelm our present consciousness, allowing us to focus effectively on current tasks. All new experiences are integrated into this foundational base, contributing to the ongoing evolution of our psychic personality throughout our lives. This evolving personality, however, is distinct from the real self, which remains unaltered by these changes. The body serves as an instrument, while the personality is a dynamic construct shaped through action and experience.

In its quest to elucidate phenomena that transcend the physical realm, science often seeks explanations rooted in physical facts, thereby avoiding the need to venture beyond the confines of the mind. From this perspective, the world is seen as a realm dominated by the mind, where physiological processes are believed to give rise to psychological phenomena, and the body's physicality dictates its potential outcomes. This viewpoint contrasts starkly with the understanding of a world where life springs from a singular source, exhibiting a unity in diversity, birthed from the Infinite Being that manifests itself in an endless array of unique yet interconnected beings. While acknowledging the constancy of this universal pattern, science tends to adhere to the notion that evolution is purely a physical and biological process. It posits that non-living matter, under specific, yet unknown circumstances, gave rise to unconscious life through the interplay of material energies. This unconscious life then supposedly evolved into a conscious mind, again under unknown conditions, as a result of material energy's actions and reactions. This scientific stance, however, often overlooks the deeper, more subtle dimensions of existence where consciousness and the immaterial aspects of being play a crucial role in the evolutionary narrative.

When exploring the interplay between mind, soul, and the physical body, we uncover that the trajectory of evolution – encompassing the development of matter, life, and mind – is intricately connected to the evolution of consciousness. This process unfolds within the constraints of time, with Earth serving as a pivotal stage in the larger cosmic journey. Three key processes accompany this universal unfolding: evolution, rebirth, and heredity. Evolution stands as the overarching aim of this grand process. Rebirth, or the cycle of incarnation, emerges as the primary mechanism facilitating the soul's growth and progression. Heredity, meanwhile, acts as one of the crucial physical conditions underpinning this journey, influencing the biological and material aspects of existence.

This perspective stands in contrast to the conventional scientific view, which typically positions the physical being at the forefront. In this view, the psyche – encompassing mental and spiritual

aspects – is often seen as a byproduct or condition of the physical body. However, the concept currently being discussed, posits the soul as the central starting point. Here, the physical being is not the primary focus but rather a vehicle for the awakening and evolution of the self, which is deeply immersed in the material realm. This approach emphasizes the primacy of the soul, viewing the physical aspects of existence as tools or means for spiritual growth and realization, rather than as the foundational elements of life and consciousness.[119]

uddhared ātmanātmānaṁ nātmānam avasādayet
ātmaiva hy ātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ
bandhur ātmātmanas tasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ
anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatru-vat
jitātmanaḥ praśāntasya paramātmā samāhitaḥ
śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoḥ
jñāna-vijñāna-tṛptātāmā kūṭa-stho vijitendriyaḥ
yukta ity ucyate yogī sama-loṣṭrāśma-kāñcanaḥ
suhṛn-mitrāry-udāsīna-madhyastha-dveṣya-bandhuṣu
sādhuṣv api ca pāpeṣu sama-buddhir viśiṣyate

To achieve liberation through one's own Self (*Atman*), one must transcend the lower self, comprising the body-mind or ego. This lower self can oscillate between being a friend and an enemy to the higher Self. Victory over the lower self is crucial for it to become an ally in one's spiritual journey. Failure to do so turns it into a formidable adversary. A person who successfully conquers the lower self and aligns with the Supreme Self attains a state of profound tranquillity, unshaken by life's dualities. Such a yogi remains unaffected by extremes of temperature, joy or sorrow, or societal judgements like honour or disgrace. They embody a sense of contentment rooted in self-knowledge and wisdom, exhibiting unwavering steadiness reminiscent of a mountain, having mastery over their senses. This enlightened yogi, who has attained *nirvikalpa samadhi*, perceives all things with equanimity, viewing a pearl, a stone, and gold with the same indifference. Their vision of equality extends beyond material possessions to encompass all beings. Friends, allies, neutral parties, adversaries, kin, foes, the virtuous, and sinners are all regarded with an impartial and peaceful mind. Such a yogi, who demonstrates equal-mindedness and tranquillity in all situations and towards all beings, is considered supremely accomplished in the spiritual realm. **Bhagavad Gita 6.5–9**

Our perceptions of life and things are often shaped by practical considerations, driven by the demands of our everyday mind and vital personality. However, alongside this pragmatic approach,

there exists a less practical aspect of our intellect. This facet yearns to perceive the reality of things unobscured, aspiring to reflect the Truth through the mirror of a purified mind. One major challenge in achieving this is the deep entanglement of this higher intellect with other facets of our personality. These include the ordinary intellect, with its own will, biases, decision-making processes, personal mindset, and the established norms of our nature. These elements often constrain our understanding, limiting our perception to a narrow, subjective viewpoint. Yet, we possess a means for indirectly experiencing Truth: through a universal, expansive intellect that comprehends itself and all things perfectly. Our consciousness has the potential to echo this broader understanding, breaking free from the limitations of the ordinary mind.

While physical science offers valuable insights, it falls short of capturing the full reality of existence. The secret of the world and our own being lies beyond mere matter. It calls for a higher truth and a more profound experience that extends beyond the confines of scientific understanding, drawing us closer to the essence of Reality. This experience is supported by intuition and strengthened by the insight of philosophical reason, and thus it makes use of facts drawn from the physical and psychic sciences. These are truths of the soul, which manifest through experience and through observation of both the outer and the inner worlds. To understand rebirth, we must know the following: the soul exists; there is an individual soul; there is spiritual evolution (development is part of the order of being and a law of the flow of time); the individual being possesses an independent past and future, since individuality does not derive from one's ancestors or from the species. From these considerations it follows that the birth of the soul is a logical necessity.

In our journey towards spiritual understanding, it's imperative to recognize that the highest, spiritual part of our being holds a position of sovereignty and independence. This aspect of our nature is not bound by the limitations imposed by our environment or by the physical constraints of humans. The soul, in its essence, possesses the power to shape its own evolutionary trajectory, just as it has influenced its past development. It's important to understand that the evolution of the real self or soul is the central truth of existence. The adoption of various forms throughout this evolutionary journey is merely a manifestation of this deeper process. As our consciousness evolves, it progressively unlocks and expresses the inherent divinity of the soul. This ongoing liberation of the self is the most reasonable explanation for the struggles encountered by the soul when constrained by matter. In the human experience, while the mind, vitality, and body have gradually manifested in the material universe, it's the soul's evolution that truly encapsulates the essence of life.[120] Until one personally experiences this awakening and connects with their original being such ideas might remain theoretical or speculative. Similarly, scientific efforts to perceive unconscious matter as the origin of conscious activity, and to derive the essence and reality of existence from it, remain intellectual concepts.

Bergson reflects on this in *Mind-Energy*: "In humans, I admit, memory is less the slave of action, yet it adheres closely to it. Our memories, at a given moment, form one solidary whole, a pyramid whose tip coincides with our present – with a present moving ceaselessly and plunging into the future. But, behind the memories which crowd in upon our present occupation and are revealed by means of it, there are others, thousands on thousands of others, below and beneath the scene illuminated by consciousness. Yes, I believe our past life is there, preserved even to the minutest details; nothing is forgotten; all we have perceived, thought, willed, from the first awakening of our consciousness, persists indefinitely. But the memories which are preserved in these obscure depths are for us in the state of invisible phantoms. They aspire, perhaps, to the light: they do not even try to rise to it; they know it is impossible, and that I, a living and acting being, have something else to do than occupy myself with them. But suppose that, at a given moment, I become disinterested in the present situation, in the pressing action, in both of the forces which concentrate on one single point all the activities of memory; suppose, in other words, I fall asleep: then these repressed memories, feeling that I have set aside the obstacle, raised the trap-door which held them back below the floor of consciousness, begin to stir. They rise and spread abroad... [...] I may liken these detached souls to the memories lying in wait in the depth of the unconscious, and the bodies to our sensations during sleep. Sensation is warm, coloured, vibrant and almost living, but vague; memory is clear and distinct, but without substance and lifeless."[121]

According to Sri Aurobindo the quintessential questions of our existence are: Why we are here, who we really are, what is behind us, in front of us, and around us, what should we do with ourselves, our inner mind, and our outer environment. The world around us is not merely a physical reality but an arena for the soul's experiences and self-realization. Life is a meaningful journey, an ascent towards a higher consciousness, and an opportunity for spiritual and personal development. The intellect cannot see the meaning of life until it understands the power and consciousness behind the mechanism, until it knows the intention of the conscious self, which not only initiates the realization of the plan, but gradually fulfils it through the self-awakening soul in all things.[122]

The infinite existence isn't an abstract concept as often perceived by the logical mind. Instead, it is a conscious spiritual reality, discernible through intuition and deeper soul experiences. The concept of rebirth is seen as a ladder for the soul's ascension from the dormant state of matter, through the stages of plant and animal life, to the human form. In this human stage, the soul grapples with ignorance and limitations, unfolding its true potential in the natural world. Human existence serves as an intermediary stage where the real self can manifest and realize its true nature within the confines of nature. Each life is a step in an upward progression, gradually leading to a heightened awareness where finite forms become conscious of their infinite reality. The question arises: whether our current state of evolution is the ultimate destination, or whether we are in transit

towards a grander realization and existence. Thus, what we experience now is merely a fragment of a vast, undiscovered potential, indicating that our journey of self-discovery and evolution is ongoing and limitless.

We advance in the development of our concepts by the use of distinction: we emphasize our own humanity in relation to nature; we see ourselves as separate, unique, special beings, and we separate the soul from our physical, vital, and mental parts. We conceive the self as a pure entity and everything else as different from it. However, these are only images; the truth behind them does not allow for separation, because there is one, infinitely changing self everywhere, in every single form. The Absolute moves simultaneously in myriad ways within its own indivisible unity.[123]

At the core of this evolutionary journey is the notion of involution, the idea that everything manifesting through evolution already existed in a different form or state. This means that the self, which later manifests in the body, was always present in matter, albeit in a passive or hidden form. Similarly, the vital force, mind, and supramental elements were always there as latent forces within the material energy. As evolution progresses, these inherent forces become increasingly apparent, revealing the infinite capacity of nature. This process involves a gradual release of these forces from their original state of involution, leading to their eventual manifestation in various forms and functions. The latent forces exert pressure upon themselves and the lower principles, striving to subordinate these operations to the higher principles and seeking fulfilment within them. Each step in this evolution brings us closer to a clearer understanding of the soul, which is always present in everything, subtly guiding the process.

- The life-force vitalizes matter, creating myriad of forms and changing patterns, endowing it with the capacity for birth, growth, and change. It introduces dynamics like action and consequence, organizing experiences in increasingly complex ways.
- The mind harnesses the life-force, using it to express will and intelligence.
- The soul imbues the mind with aspirations towards beauty, goodness, wisdom, and greatness, steering it towards an ideal existence.

buddhyā viśuddhayā yukto dhṛtyātmānaṁ niyamya ca
śabdādīn viṣayāṁs tyaktvā rāga-dveṣau vyudasya ca ...
ahaṅkāraṁ balaṁ darpaṁ kāmaṁ krodhaṁ parigraham
vimucya nirmamaḥ śānto brahma-bhūyāya kalpate
brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati

samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu mad-bhaktiṁ labhate parām
bhaktyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yaś cāsmi tattvataḥ
tato māṁ tattvato jñātvā viśate tad-anantaram
sarva-karmāṇy api sadā kurvāṇo mad-vyapāśrayaḥ
mat-prasādād avāpnoti śāśvataṁ padam avyayam

One who unites with the pure intellect and firmly disciplines their mind, turning away from sound and other objects of senses, frees themselves from attachment and hatred. [...] Free from false ego, attachment, arrogance, lust, anger, and sense of possession, and with a peaceful mind, such a person is capable of attaining *Brahman*. Having become *Brahman* and attained the blissful self, they live without regret or desire, regarding all beings alike, thus achieving supreme devotion towards me (the Absolute). Through their devotion, they can truly understand my essence; they come to know me completely when united with me without delay. Though they act ceaselessly, under my protection and through my grace, they attain an eternal and unchanging state. **Bhagavad Gita 18.51 & 18.53–56**

cetasā sarva-karmāṇi mayi sannyasya mat-paraḥ
buddhi-yogam upāśritya mac-cittaḥ satataṁ bhava
mac-cittaḥ sarva-durgāṇi mat-prasādāt tariṣyasi
atha cet tvam ahaṅkārān na śroṣyasi vinaṅkṣyasi ...
īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ hṛd-deśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati
bhrāmayan sarva-bhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā
tam eva śaraṇaṁ gaccha sarva-bhāvena bhārata
tat-prasādāt parāṁ śāntiṁ sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śāśvatam
iti te jñānam ākhyātaṁ guhyād guhyataraṁ mayā
vimṛśyaitad aśeṣeṇa yathecchasi tathā kuru

Dedicate all your actions to me in your mind, and make me your ultimate goal. Seek refuge in the discerning mind (*buddhi yoga*), and steadfastly focus your mind on me. If you anchor your consciousness in me, you will surmount all of life's obstacles by my grace. However, if you are driven by ego and disregard my guidance, you will be led astray. [...] The Supreme Controller resides in the heart of all beings, and Its cosmic energy orchestrates the movement of all beings, each according to their nature, as if they were all attached to the rotating wheel of a potter. Surrender wholeheartedly to It! Through Its grace, you will achieve supreme peace and eternal tranquillity. I have imparted to you this profound wisdom, the most secret of secrets. Reflect on it deeply, and then act according to your own convictions. **Bhagavad Gita 18.57–58 & 18.61–63**

Spiritual evolution is a process of creation, self-creation, and the revelation of the inherent potential within existence. It positions human life as a critical stage in this grand unfolding, where the greatness of the self goes through a phase of secret, voluntary exile within the confines of form and material existence. The world's workings are an evolution, an unfolding of the manifold forces coiled within matter. The real self, with all its power, resides in this material energy. This self is described as infinite and immortal, existing as an eternally self-conscious being that expresses itself in a finite world. Each movement of this self is a testament to its inherent infinitude. The existence of the world is attributed to the self's delight in its own infinite existence and its myriad variations. Birth and creation are acts of self-expression, where the consciousness and the power of being are self-created and take pleasure in their own manifestation. Creation is an act of self-expression, and the embodiment of the real self signifies a form of this expression. Matter can be viewed as a manifestation of the self, the vital force represents the energy of the self's existence, and the mind is the mechanism through which the self's consciousness operates. All kind of nature is the manifestation of the divine and serves dual roles as both a hindrance and a means in the evolutionary process.[124]

According to Bergson, the purpose of human life is to achieve unity with reality. His extensive research revealed an evolving definition of the Absolute or God, first as duration (*durée*), then as life-force (*élan vital*) and consciousness (memory), and ultimately as love. These diverse definitions weave together into a singular narrative, each elucidating different facets of the same entity's nature. In the *Two Sources*, Bergson's exploration reaches a profound depth, highlighting the transformative power of universal love, as understood by mystics, in reshaping humanity with a creative purpose. "What it wants to do, with God's help, is to complete the creation of the human species and make of humanity what it would have straightaway become, had it been able to assume its final shape without the assistance of man himself. Or to use words which mean, as we shall see, the same thing in different terms: its direction is exactly that of the vital impetus; it is this impetus itself, communicated in its entirety to exceptional men, who in their turn would fain impart it to all humanity, and by a living contradiction change into creative effort that created thing which is a species, and turn into movement what was, by definition, a stop."[125]

"It is hard to conceive a love which is, so to speak, at work, and yet applies to nothing. As a matter of fact, the mystics unanimously bear witness that God needs us, just as we need God. Why should He need us unless it be to love us? And it is to this very conclusion that the philosopher who holds to the mystical experience must come. Creation will appear to him as God undertaking to create creators, that he may have, besides himself, beings worthy of his love."[126] For what is movement if it

does not aim towards something? What is creative evolution if it lacks awareness of its own creations? And what is action without purpose?

Creative evolution is a process where every movement reflects its spiritual origin, revealing the source of its spiritual journey. It is not a mere self-generating movement but a process actively shaped by the real self, which not only observes but also influences creation. This process involves both involution, where the real self projects outwards (descent), and evolution, where it returns to itself (ascent). The stages of involution comprise existence, consciousness-power, bliss, the supramental, mind, life-force, and matter. Thus, consciousness, present in matter, is capable of evolution alongside other elements such as life-force and mind. As evolution progresses, it unveils more of the unmanifested consciousness inherent in all things. Concurrently, lower states integrate into higher ones, with various planes ascending and transforming as the higher principle descends into them.

In addition to upward and downward movements, humans also experience an inward movement. This inward journey involves the development of the Absolute within the human being, manifesting as a psychic being. This individuated self accumulates experiences while remaining in direct contact with reality. The goal is to increasingly infuse the light of the psychic being into the more superficial aspects of existence (mind, life-force, matter), thereby effectuating a complete transformation of nature. This transformation becomes possible through the descent of the plane beyond the mind, and thus the transformation from ignorance to knowledge can be fulfilled. Individual consciousness is born through an immersion into self-forgetfulness, through which the sense of identity with the universe is lost and a separated consciousness comes to the fore. The result of this is the emergence of the body, within which individual consciousness becomes aware of itself as a distinct ego. Birth, therefore, is a necessity of the soul's manifestation on the material plane; it cannot be an isolated phenomenon without past and future, for that would break the rhythm of the Self's self-manifestation, thus birth is followed by birth. Higher levels await the human being; the next decisive step will take place within the human, since the plane beyond the mind must appear and spread. It is in the human being that consciousness is present the most openly, in whom it can become entirely free and can transform into a supramental state. The development of nature as a whole does not have an ethical significance; the driving force of evolution is the Self's striving toward its own self-expression.

In considering our higher purpose, it's pertinent to discuss self-improvement or education, especially in terms of the preparation that maximizes life's potential. True success for an individual lies in their ability to express the innate, vibrant forces within, thereby attaining genuine freedom. This true freedom hinges on three key conditions:

- Firstly, an individual should follow their deepest creative impulses and intuitions, have the opportunities to do so, and receive support in these endeavours.
- Secondly, effective cooperation with other living beings is crucial, recognizing that everyone possesses this inner power. Thus, it becomes essential to learn to acknowledge and engage with this power in others.
- Finally, being in harmony with life itself is a fundamental aspect of this journey.

These three principles – creative act, cooperation, and interconnectedness – are deeply intertwined and significantly shape the course of events, their organization, and methodologies. Individual existence is not isolated; it encompasses social relationships and motivations, which are essential for the true development of individuality. Cooperation and creative action are indispensable at all levels for all beings. As active members of a collective, individuals can fully express their inner selves, leading to a greater sense of freedom and happiness. This engagement not only enriches and develops one's personality but also fosters a profound connection with life. Experiencing life directly is crucial. It involves not only the understanding of concepts and forms but also feeling the continuity and presence of the real self. Individuals can occasionally detach from what separates them from other beings and entities. This detachment can be cultivated through direct observation of life, eliminating barriers to intuition, and forming connections with the natural world, including plants and animals. Such engagements provide deeper insights into the phenomena of life, gradually leading to a comprehensive understanding of living beings and the essence of nature.[127]

It's crucial to acknowledge that the ordinary functions of human existence – the body as a mechanical entity, the language of reason, numerical logic, and the mathematical mind – often dominate our experience, imposing specific limitations due to their distinctive characteristics. This dominance creates a form of isolation from the vital impulse, the direct and flow-like experience of life. However, it is through this very isolation, from the realm of the mind and intellect, that one can "fall back" into the direct stream of life via intuition. The initial step in this process is to comprehend our multi-layered reality: recognizing the body as both a controllable instrument and a boundless force. Such understanding eludes the untrained mind and standard perception. We encounter the life-force primarily after it has been processed through mental analysis. But actually it's in the moments of failure or malfunction of this mechanism that we are given an opportunity to glimpse the truth. Thus, while there is merit in constantly enhancing and maintaining our tools, it is often their absence or breakdown that brings us closer to life's inherent flow. By experiencing these two extremes – as

structured means and as free-flowing force – we can begin to transcend the apparent duality, integrating these experiences and aligning them with the true purpose of existence.[128]

Henri Bergson stands out as one of the least systematic yet profoundly influential philosophers of the modern era. His remarkable ability to provoke thought and steer us toward new directions and perspectives is especially noteworthy. He places a high premium on the pursuit of truth and the reverence for its discovery, which is evident in his evolving concepts and steadfast approach. A holistic exploration of his philosophy allows us to gain deeper insights, especially when viewed in the context of Eastern traditions. It becomes apparent that the best way to comprehend his philosophy is through the lens of intuition, a method also central to yoga philosophy. It's not imperative to grasp every word with perfect accuracy; rather, the true essence and message of his philosophy can unfold as we immerse ourselves in it, interpret it, and endeavour to apply it in our perception and our practical life.

V. Intuition, the Instrument of Freedom

1. Transcending Everyday Consciousness

The limits of experience in the mind and its extension by intuition – The limiting power of reason, perception, thought and language – The stages of higher consciousness

If the intellect, and through it, consciousness is to become liberated in human beings, an effective means must be found to transcend the limitations of the mind, expand cognition, and move beyond a matter-focused perspective. This means is intuition – a form of spiritual or intellectual empathy, a conscious union or identification through which we can delve into the core of a subject, thereby connecting with its essence. Intuition enables us to feel at one with the object of our contemplation, and thus understand its inner reality. As previously discussed, this direct experience is a pathway to deeper knowledge of reality and life, forming a part of the evolution of consciousness. In contrast to the working of intuition, the intellect circles around an object and, regardless of its proximity, always perceives it externally. Intellectual analysis deconstructs the object into known elements and represents it as a function of what it is not, that is, as a function of what it looks externally based on its elements, instead of deriving the object's reality from the its inner essence. It also tends to oversimplify things, then analytically dissects all experience into isolated parts, arranged sequentially, missing the inherent unity. Reason, therefore, can be seen as both a limitation and a possibility, contingent upon our approach to it. Intellectual effort or focus becomes a vehicle for achieving intuition.[129]

Metaphysics or transcendental experience demands a consciousness capable of harmonizing and unifying the entirety of experience. It represents an experience beyond the segmented perceptions of the mind or intellect, which discerns unity amidst diversity. True intuition is also evident in the experiences of mystic sages, who achieve a direct understanding of the real self or God.[130]

"We have to choose, in philosophy, between the method of pure reasoning, which aims at a complete and decisive result, unable to be perfected since it is supposed to be perfect, and an empirical method, content with approximate results which can be endlessly corrected and enlarged. The first method, because it aims at making us immediately certain, condemns us to remain always in the simply probable or rather in the purely possible, for it is rare that it cannot serve to demonstrate indifferently either of two opposed theories equally coherent and equally plausible. The second aims first at simple probability, but since it works on a plane where probability may increase indefinitely, it brings us gradually to a state practically equivalent to certainty."[131]

Pure reasoning and logic, while valuable tools, have inherent limitations that obstruct the understanding of the real self. Ancient traditions affirm that these faculties are instruments of the self, not the self itself. On the journey through supramental levels, as one advances, conjecture evolves into intuition and eventually solidifies into gnosis, or certainty. This transformation occurs because consciousness becomes one with its object, which exactly reflects Bergson's method of intuition. The ultimate aim of spiritual knowledge is the Absolute, the Infinite, which both relates to and transcends our being and the universe. Yet, our current grasp of the universe and the individual is superficial, shaped by the mind and senses. These are imperfect instruments until they are enlightened by knowledge that transcends the mind. In its current form, the mind and senses do not reflect their source and their underlying reality; they lack harmony with it, pursuing their own separate interests.

The true vision of reality emerges when higher intelligence corrects the values and conclusions imparted by the mind and senses, a process akin to scientific method. However, beyond this lies a knowledge that transcends intellect, not just a beam of light (as with intellect) but the entire spectrum of illumination, embodying the self and the reality of spiritual experience. This knowledge and consciousness can orient towards the Absolute, viewing existence from the perspective of the Absolute. Thus, the ignorance, effort, and development of the mind and senses are the basis for the soul's self-realization and, on a universal scale, provide the material foundation for the unfolding and fulfilment of the Absolute. They hold significance and power not in isolation but through their connection with the Absolute, deriving their value from this relationship with Reality and Truth.

The Supreme represents our real and highest self, our innermost essence, which constitutes our manifested nature. Spiritual knowledge aims to uncover this true Self, eschewing misleading appearances. It seeks to discern that the body is but the perceptible form of the Absolute, not our actual self or the foundation of our existence. When one perceives matter as the basis of existence, or the physical brain, nerves, cells, and molecules as the ultimate truth in humans, one sees only the shadow of reality, not the reality itself. This limited vision overlooks the whole picture: a part cannot fully represent the whole but merely gives an indication to it, providing language, expression, and a pathway to it. The matter-focused view confuses creation with the creative self and power, mistaking the means of expression for what it expresses and what is manifested through it. Matter serves as the field and basis for the operation of the vital force, linking the self with the forms of its operation and sustaining them. Material movement thus becomes an external signalling system through which the self interprets the truths of the Absolute and manifests them in matter.

According to Bergson, intuition manifests in us uniquely: when we delve deeply into our will, and align it with the underlying intention, we perceive and sense that reality is an unceasing process of growth and infinite creation. This dynamic of the will is evident in every discovery, in every act

of free and deliberate choice, and in every spontaneous, creative endeavour. We embody a duality, consisting of the life impulse (conscious force) and matter. We carry within us the remnants of matter that have been assimilated by the life impulse. When the continuous flow of creation is momentarily halted, matter is formed. The creative current, akin to a poet's inspiration, and intuition is the catalyst for this process. Matter, then, is like the words of a poem, giving form and structure to this ethereal inspiration.[132] Intuition, originating from a plane beyond the intellect, filters into our thoughts and then projects outwardly to create matter. This process aligns with the concept of the *koshas*, or sheaths, discussed earlier.

Our cultural context and ingrained ways of thinking significantly influence our perception and understanding of reality. To transcend these confines and reach the source, it is crucial to comprehend the functions and purposes of the mind and intellect and to grasp the novel way in which intuition operates. The more we understand these facets and their manifestations in our lives, the more capable we become of transforming them. This expansiveness is innate, allowing us to broaden each confined and limited agent we encounter. By stepping beyond the familiar and known, beyond our conventional concepts and images, we open ourselves to new experiences. What we relinquish in this process is merely our rigid, constrained grasp on bits of reality, which is replaced with a more authentic, present-focused, and aware existence. This transformation is not necessarily a singular, irreversible shift, but rather a continuous, daily recalibration of our multifaceted being and toolkit, leading to a life rooted in expanded consciousness and deeper awareness.

Intuition serves as a pathway to navigate from the divisions created by perception in the world's continuum back to the inherent, interconnected, and interpenetrating elements of our inner duration. The errors of thought often arise due to its position at the juncture of two realities – the individual's external and internal reality – with awareness predominantly at the point of intersection. External reality is space, characterized by the absence of movement and only defined by the positions of the moving self. This is a constant present, a homogeneous simultaneity where successive states exist but are isolated – the existing state vanishes when a new state emerges. Contrarily, internal reality is time, where heterogeneous states of consciousness, retained in memory, overlap and weave together, forming a process, a duration, a continuous life of memory and consciousness. "Within our ego (limited self), there is succession without mutual externality; outside the ego, in pure space, there is mutual externality without succession."[133]

Duration's moments can be approximated to corresponding spatial states, allowing comparison. The intersection of time and space manifests as simultaneity. As we observe spatial reality, we tend to interpret the succession of time as simultaneity, aligning it with the juxtaposition characteristic of space. This leads to the erroneous notion of time as a series of homogeneous, successive moments,

external to each other. Consequently, the real self contemplates not only external reality but also its own internal reality through the medium of space, not directly, not as a duration.

The real self has the capacity to synthesize sensations in two distinct manners: It can either turn inwards, immersing itself in the sensations passing through it, retaining and organizing them into heterogeneous groups; or it can remain at the point of intersection, where it separates the sensations as present states, disassembles them, and places them in the homogeneous medium of space for analysis and organization. This separation is a consequence of perception at the reference point of space and time, of the external and the internal realms. It presupposes that the external and internal worlds are separate and real in themselves, each embodying a transcendent idea.[134]

The concept of intuition has been a focal point for several European philosophers. St. Thomas Aquinas viewed contemplation as a process, a melding of reason and objectivity that transcends mere thought. Sándor Horváth, in his examination, posited that intuition falls within the cognitive realm, characterized by how consciousness projects onto an object, encompassing both effort and intention. This process brings the subject of cognition into direct contact with its object, forming a perception of reality grounded in metaphysical ideas. Although cognitive processes predominantly feature intellectual and logical elements, crucial for the verification of various points, they are not the sole contributors. "The logical framework, while serving as a ladder to the apex of knowledge acquisition and aiding in verifying knowledge, should not obstruct the vision of truth's hidden relations, often elusive to structured schemes. Nor should it impede the evaluation and vivification of our intellectual gains." In Bergson's philosophy, life manifests through intuition as the realization of being, whereas in Thomism, truth animates within intuition. In this context, truth, once enlivened, becomes the genesis of intuition.[135]

Numerous thinkers have acknowledged intuition's supremacy over reason, traditionally held to operate within the confines of time. However, transcending reason doesn't necessitate stepping outside of time; rather, it involves immersing back into "duration", into the simultaneity of existence. This shift allows movement from intellectual to visionary thinking, from the relative to the absolute, capturing the essence of reality in its dynamic, ever-changing form. Intuition, in its quest to reach the eternal, often relies heavily on the intellectual. It replaces multifaceted intellectual concepts with a singular, encompassing idea, refining rather than surpassing the mind's level. It strives to present reality's entirety in one principle, aiming to grasp totality at once, seeking a definitive explanation, and crafting an abstract, general unity. Reason, in its approach, starts from the static and attempts to reconstruct movement by aligning static elements. It encircles itself with constants, viewing change as a secondary addition to these constants.

Intuitive metaphysics embraces the flow of reality as a rich and complete unity, characterized by continuity that illuminates all things. It engages with new effort each time, refraining from rigid definitions and resisting the insistence on defining phenomena. This intuitive approach is intimately connected to inner duration, capturing a succession, an organic growth from within. It perceives the uninterrupted extension of the past into the present, enveloping the future in its scope. Intuition represents the direct vision of the true self, unmediated and unrefracted. It is the undivided, substantive continuity of the inner life current. This form of consciousness is akin to vision, scarcely distinguishable from the object it perceives, achieving a form of knowledge that is simultaneous contact and oneness with the object. Intuition can also be viewed as the synthesis of various complementary yet non-equivalent perspectives, either of intuition itself or of the reality it seeks to understand. The real, in this context, cannot be constructed from pre-existing, experienced elements; what the intellect segments from the whole is insufficient.

Intuition leads us toward the universal self, a realm where individual selves intermingle, enabling a profound experience of sympathy, as the boundaries between selves blur more than between physical bodies (because space defines clear divisions). Pure change is imbued with spirituality. Hence, intuition strives to apprehend spirituality in material things. Yet, our purified and spiritualized selves also blend with human consciousness, meaning that intuitive efforts vary across different levels and points.[136]

draṣṭṛdṛśyoparaktaṁ cittaṁ sarvārtham

By discerning the observer (*Purusha*) and the observed (*Prakriti*) – the knower and the entity to be known – the true self gains comprehension of all objects. **Patanjali Yoga Sutras 4.23**

The yogic tradition, as expounded by Sri Aurobindo and grounded in ancient knowledge, identifies various levels of intuition and higher consciousness. These include the higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, intuition, and overmind. Intuition in this context is not merely a sense or faculty; it is a vision of reality, a direct experience emanating from above or within. This experience is a manifestation of the divine principle, which illuminates the planes of the mind, life-force, and body in diverse aspects. This kind of inner vision possesses a perceptive power capable of apprehending aspects of the truth, facilitating a broader and deeper understanding. For intuition to systematically and structurally reveal truth, it must penetrate the surface being, where the intellect is inherently structured, thus, it plays a pivotal role. Consequently, the era of intuitive knowledge, exemplified by the Vedic scriptures and *Upanishads*, evolved into the era of rational knowledge. The inspired word giving way to metaphysical philosophy, which later paved the way for experimental

science.[137] Intuition, when influenced or guided by the mind or reason, is prone to errors. These errors can be mitigated or eliminated as the plane above the mind is raised and generalized, allowing for a purer form of intuitive insight. This elevation and generalization of intuition beyond the confines of the mind open pathways to a more accurate and profound understanding of reality.

rāja-vidyā rāja-guhyaṁ pavitram idam uttamam
pratyakṣāvagamaṁ dharmyaṁ su-sukhaṁ kartum avyayam

This knowledge is the queen of wisdom, the highest secret, and the ultimate sanctity. Its realization grants immediate experience; it is the epitome of duty (*dharma*), simple to perform, a joy to practice, and enduring. **Bhagavad Gita 9.2**

True knowledge, according to yoga philosophy, resides within the self and differs fundamentally from information acquired from external sources such as books or hearsay. The role of external teachings, including those from teachers and scriptures, is primarily to awaken and stimulate the innate intuition within us rather than to serve as a direct source of the ultimate truth. The true merit of a teacher lies in their ability to illuminate what already exists within the student: the inner wisdom of the self (*Atma-tattva*). Yoga is often understood in terms of its capacity to foster an intuitive connection or clairvoyance. This deepens the alignment between the inner wisdom of the real self and the limited understanding of the our external personality. This intuitive perception is akin to a witness consciousness, embodying the essence of both the real self and the Absolute (*Brahman*) within the individual (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm). This concept underscores the importance of meditation in yoga, as it facilitates transcendence beyond the limitations of the mind, directing focus towards the true centre of consciousness.

In yogic philosophy, the ultimate goal of knowledge is to understand and connect with the One that underlies all aspects, purposes, forms, and forces of existence. These are all seen as manifestations of the One. Ordinary knowledge, characterized by intellectual understanding and the practical application of the mind, life-force, and matter, is differentiated from true or higher knowledge. This common form of knowledge focuses on phenomena and their governing laws, offering practical efficiency and control (of life and nature) but not providing a deeper, more profound understanding of reality. Yoga is inextricably linked to the entirety of life. An expansive consciousness or a higher state of being does not merely equate to a more sophisticated intellect, an enlightened mentality bolstered by greater energy, or a purer moral character. Rather, the difference lies not in degree but in the fundamental nature and essence. The true foundation and dynamic principle of existence are distinct. Yogic knowledge seeks to penetrate beyond the mind's limitations

into the hidden consciousness, which is the foundation of all existence. This higher consciousness is innately all-knowing, and through it, one can reach the Absolute, understanding the world in its true nature and essence. The visible world, in this context, is just a perceivable expression of a deeper reality that lies beyond the mind and senses. Phenomena are reflections of this ultimate reality, and in essence, everything is a manifestation of the one universal Self.

The pursuit of knowledge, particularly self-knowledge and an understanding of God, transcends what can be derived from physical and tangible analysis alone. Science, with its tools and methodologies, is often limited to exploring and uncovering truths about the physical realm. By relying solely on sensory perceptions and physical instruments, we risk confining our understanding to the physical plane, potentially leading to the belief that nothing exists beyond it. This limitation can result in the denial of the existence of a self or a divine presence, reducing our understanding of existence to merely the sum of our physical components like the brain, nerves, and body. Such a conclusion is often the result of presupposing that the physical plane is the only reality, which inherently limits our understanding and prevents us from exploring beyond these initial conceptions. If we consider the possibility of a self-existent Reality that is not immediately apparent to the senses, it necessitates seeking and understanding this reality through means other than just the reason and intellect. While the intellect is capable of conceptualizing truths beyond sensory perception, its tendency to interpret results as the necessary cause of a conceived thing can lead to a limited understanding. Intellectual conviction about the self or God is valuable, but it is only a starting point, only the organization of concepts. Yogic practice emphasizes that true understanding is not fully realized through intellectual knowledge alone. Intellectual mastery does not inherently transform the being; one can achieve intellectual perfection yet remain fundamentally unchanged in essence. Yoga seeks a transformation that goes beyond mere intellectual understanding.[138]

Intuitive thinking involves thinking in terms of duration, starting from movement and perceiving the movement as reality – thus, a static stillness is a moment of movement. Intuition linked to duration and growth perceives an unbroken continuity of the unpredictable and ever-renewing. It recognizes that the self is capable of creating more (from itself) than what currently exists, and that spirituality involves this continuous creation. Concepts derived from intuition may initially appear vague, especially when compared to the immediate clarity of intellectually derived concepts. This is because they represent rearranged concepts that we already possessed. Our intellect finds familiarity in the new by recognizing elements of the old, and this brings a sense of satisfaction. This type of understanding is quick, reliable, and comfortable, free from risk or doubt. On the other hand, notions arising from intuition can initially seem vague, regardless of our intellectual capabilities. They cannot be recreated with pre-existing elements because they inherently lack such elements. They often appear incomprehensible at first, as we cannot rebuild them from familiar concepts. Yet, we must embrace

them, for despite their possible obscurity, they hold the potential to solve problems deemed unsolvable, casting light on both themselves and their context. Philosophies, relying on pure concepts, operated outside of tangible experience. They clung to overarching concepts, like their interpretations of God, from which they derived and encompassed everything. However, true existence is inextricably linked to experience: in the realm of material objects, it is perceived through sight, touch, and external senses; when it pertains to the real self, it is experienced through intuition.

The synthesis of intuition and intellect is essential for a deeper understanding of reality. This cooperative approach involves intuitively perceiving truths and then allowing the intellect to verify and formulate these insights in its own way. This process integrates synthetic and supramental knowledge, emphasizing the importance of adopting the right analytical perspective. It requires an expansive will, an intuitive aspiration, and a determination to experience the reality of things, not just understand them conceptually. Concepts, as they are, are static snapshots extracted from the dynamic flow of change. To truly comprehend reality, we must reinsert these static "impermanences" back into the ongoing flow of change. Often, our understanding is hindered because we fail to grasp this flow, mistakenly imposing linearity, succession, and separation to a reality where there is, in fact, coexistence and unity.

Many philosophical questions revolve around the cause of being, the relationship between being and non-being, and the nature of order and disorder. However, when engaged in creative thought or will, these questions lose their significance. The creative mind, filled with its own purpose, is less concerned with notions of non-being or disorder. In asking such questions, we often unwittingly impose assumptions and hierarchical structures – for instance, placing non-being before being or disorder before order. Instead of focusing on relativity, we should concentrate on reality, which encompasses both matter and the real self. There is a point of contact between matter and the real self where mutual understanding and development can occur. This intersection is where philosophy or metaphysics can be verified by science, and where science can also advance through philosophical insights. By acknowledging this point of contact, both disciplines can collaborate to approach and possibly comprehend the Absolute. This approach calls for an imagination that is so closely aligned with reality that it leaves no room for misinterpretation or alternative explanations. It's a call to embrace reality fully, recognizing that matter and the real self are not just in proximity but in continuous interaction, offering a common ground for philosophical inquiry and scientific exploration.

Understanding the dynamic nature of reality requires reorienting our perception, which traditionally emphasizes static stillness and immutability as fundamental, with movement and change being merely incidental. Our habitual thinking and speech have reinforced this view, perceiving qualities and states as fixed and change as a result of their succession. From the

continuum, this type of perception extracts elements it views as immutable, yet in reality, within the smallest perceptible interval, there are trillions of vibrations and events, a continuous flow that defies simple unravelling. To align more closely with the true nature of reality, we need to reverse this habitual direction of perception. We should begin to see reality primarily as change and movement, with static states as mere snapshots of this dynamic flow. This shift requires us to use reason, a tool for human liberation, to correct old habits. While intuition provides direct access to the essence of things, reason assigns them a spatial location and interprets them.[139]

Furthermore, the path to self-knowledge, which ultimately leads to understanding the true self, involves turning our gaze inward. The Absolute has oriented the gates of the self outward, and most people tend to focus externally on things and phenomena. However, an effective preparation for inward focus is psychological self-observation and analysis. This inward journey is often easier than trying to comprehend the external world. We first realize the higher aspects within ourselves, as it's possible, though rare and difficult, for a purified, quietened mind to reflect God and for intense concentration to discover the divine essence in the world and the real self in nature.

parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūs tasmāt parāṅ paśyati nāntarātman
kaścid dhīraḥ pratyag-ātmānam aikṣad āvṛtta-cakśur amṛtat-vam icchan

The self-existent Absolute designed the senses to be outwardly oriented, leading humans to perceive the external world rather than the inner self (*Atman*). However, those who can divert their gaze from sensory objects, driven by a yearning for immortality, are able to perceive the real self within themselves. **Katha Upanishad 2.1.1**

The intellect is the attention that pure consciousness, or in other words, the real self gives to matter, and it was developed by nature to enable humans to utilize and control matter. It thrives in the realm of space and resonates with the inorganic world. However, when the self redirects its focus inward, returning to its essence, it transcends the boundaries of reason and enters the domain of intuition. In this state, it is not confined by the limitations inherent in rational thought. This type of attention is what the soul devotes to itself while engaged with matter, which becomes its object of focus. The role of the brain, too, is to select from among memories those that are useful for a given activity and to exclude the rest—thus it does not think, but rather prevents thinking, so that the human being may attend to life and not become lost in daydreaming.

The functioning or domain of the intellect does not diminish through intuition; on the contrary, it expands, because we do not reduce it to a single mode of gaining knowledge. "There is no thought without a refined mind (‘*esprit de finesse*’), and a refined mind is the reflection of intuition in the intellect."[140] It offers a broader spectrum of cognition, embracing both scientific understanding and intuitive insight. This aligns with the human capacity for creation and self-expression, encompassing both the external world and our inner selves. To engage more profoundly in nature's creative evolution, we must be open to novelty and willing to discard restrictive norms. "Installed in universal mobility, consciousness contracts in a quasi-instantaneous vision an immensely long history which unfolds outside it. The higher the consciousness, the stronger is this tension of its own duration in relation to that of things."[141] This tension is not merely instinctual or emotional; it's a process of reflection, a sophisticated operation of the intellect that synthesizes and interprets the vast expanse of experience.

The intellect, in its capacity to perceive, judge, and discriminate, operates independently of sensory inputs, desires, or habitual responses, aiming for mastery and knowledge. In yoga, this is considered a state of freedom and autonomy. However, in its current human manifestation, even at its peak, the intellect is not fully free. It often gets entangled with lower functions, leading to an impure, obstructed operation that frequently regresses to a lower level of functioning. In its purest form, the intellect is detached from lower movements and motives. It steps back from the object of its study, examines it impartially, and through comparison, contrast, and analogy, it places the object in its proper context within the whole. This process is based on accurately observed data and logical deduction. Such an intellect is characterized by its capacity for impartial observation, judgment, and reflection.

Upon achieving this state, the concept of reason can be expanded to include a higher level of functioning. This higher level is not mere intelligence but a form of vision, not simple understanding but a deep insight into knowledge. It's not about seeking knowledge based on observed data, but rather possessing an inherent truth that it reveals through revelation and intuitive reasoning. This enlightened discovery is marked by the intellect being enlivened by insights from above itself, surrendering to enthusiasm, and allowing a greater influx of intuitive and inspiring knowledge. The intuitive mind acts as a receiver and channel for supramental faculties. Currently, the process of intuition and inspiration, often arising in response to the heart's or intellect's promptings, is imperfect and discontinuous. The intellect tends to break these insights down to fit into its imperfect understanding, while the heart transforms them to align with emotional desires and biases, and the lower cravings may even distort them into hunger and passion.

When the higher intellect functions purely, without the disturbance of lower faculties, it offers pure forms of truth. This includes vision that sees beyond the constraints of the mind and senses,

inspiration of truth replacing imagination, clarity of connection over reasoning, and intuition supplanting mere conclusions. This form of knowing encompasses an all-recording knowledge that spans the past and future, transcending ordinary memory. To fully embrace this higher faculty of knowledge is to transcend our current human limitations. However, if we adhere too rigidly to a system of principles, intuitive or meditative perception may become subsumed under intellectual functioning. The key methods of self-knowledge – wisdom, selfless action, and love or self-surrender – can, in their unity, extend our consciousness beyond the limitations of the mind. A refined, intuitive mind or inner sense (*antah-karana*) naturally distinguishes the transcendental interests of the real self from the matter-focused aspirations of the limited self or ego, transcending contradictions, attachments, and also religious limitations.

yadā te moha-kalilaṁ buddhir vyatitariṣyati
tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ śrotavyasya śrutasya ca
śruti-vipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā
samādhāv acalā buddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi

When your intellect transcends the maelstrom of misconceptions, you attain a state of equanimity, becoming indifferent to the knowledge gained from past teachings or future learnings. Once your intellect remains unshaken amidst the diverse teachings of the scriptures, and you remain steadfast and undisturbed in the trance of contemplation, known as *samadhi*, you will have achieved yoga. **Bhagavad Gita 2.52–53**

Samadhi represents the first and foremost solid, unbiased, and objective point of experience upon which we can rely. This inward journey transcends the distinctions of names and forms, enabling us to comprehend the Absolute, rather than merely its transformations and manifestations. The challenge of discernment arises from various factors, such as the projection or distraction of ignorance, misrecognition or misunderstanding, and a range of delusions including false mental constructs, abstract notions, and hallucinations. In this realm, intuitive knowledge, or gnosis (*prajna*), is recognized as the pinnacle of wisdom. In such a state, there is no specific worldly perception or knowledge, but rather a perfect consciousness and bliss (*anandamaya*) emanating from the pure self.[142]

arjuna uvāca: sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhi-sthasya keśava
sthita-dhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣeta kim āsīta vrajeta kim

śrī-bhagavān uvāca: prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha mano-gatān
ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthita-prajñas tadocyate
duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣu vigata-spṛhaḥ
vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ sthita-dhīr munir ucyate
yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehas tat tat prāpya śubhāśubham
nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā
yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ kūrmo 'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā
viṣayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ
rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate...
tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta mat-paraḥ
vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Arjuna inquired, "O Keshava, how is a person established in contemplative consciousness, absorbed in *samadhi*, characterized? How does such a person with perfect knowledge speak, sit, and walk?"

The Lord answered, "When one relinquishes all desires of the mind, finding satisfaction within the true self alone, that person is established in pure consciousness. A sage of sound mind is not perturbed amidst suffering, remains untempted by pleasure, and is devoid of attraction, fear, and anger. Such a person, unaffected by praise or criticism, free from attachment and devoid of aversion, possesses a steadfast contemplative mind. As a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell, so does one who can pull back the senses from their objects demonstrate firm knowledge. Although the embodied soul may avoid sense gratification, the longing for pleasure persists. True liberation from these desires comes only through experiencing the Supreme, leading to a serene realization of one's true self. [...] The individual who has disciplined the senses, engaging in yoga, and sees me (God) as the Supreme, is known to possess an unwavering mind." **Bhagavad Gita 2.54–59 & 2.61**

rāga-dveṣa-vimuktais tu viṣayān indriyaiś caran
ātma-vaśyair vidheyātmā prasādam adhigacchati
prasāde sarva-duḥkhānāṁ hānir asyopajāyate
prasanna-cetaso hy āśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate
nāsti buddhir ayuktasya na cāyuktasya bhāvanā
na cābhāvayataḥ śāntir aśāntasya kutaḥ sukham...
vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṁś carati niḥspṛhaḥ
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sa śāntim adhigacchati

eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha nainām̐ prāpya vimuhyati
sthitvāsyām anta-kāle 'pi brahma-nirvāṇam ṛcchati

One who embarks on the spiritual journey towards realizing the true self (*Atman*), while remaining detached from desires and aversions, effectively controls their senses. This mastery over the senses leads to a profound tranquillity of the mind. In achieving this inner calm, one's sufferings diminish, serenity permeates the mind, and the intellect stabilizes. Without the practice of yoga, clarity of mind is unattainable, as it is rooted in concentration and meditation. Without these, inner peace remains elusive, and true happiness, unrelated to external or internal objects, cannot be found. [...] One who relinquishes all desires and attachments, transcending the sense of a limited self and possessiveness, and who sheds the limited self, will surely find perfect peace. This state of being is known as *Brahmi sthiti*, a settled state in *Brahman*, the Absolute Truth. Achieving this state, one is no longer deceived by misconceptions, and at life's end, with focused concentration on this ultimate truth, one merges with the Ultimate Reality (*Brahma nirvana*). **Bhagavad Gita 2.64–66 & 2.71–72**

yasyānuvrittyaḥ pratibuddha ātmāsmin saṁdehye gahane praviṣṭaḥ
sa viśva-kṛt sa hi sarvasya kartā tasya lokaḥ sau loka eva

One who, seeking its trace, has found it with a pure mind and wakeful awareness, and knows directly and intimately the Self (*Atman*), has entered the dangerous and inaccessible realm (the body). He is the Soul, the creator of the universe, the maker of all things, truly the Lord of all planes and worlds, the Soul. **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.13**

One who realizes Brahman understands oneself as the inner self that has entered the given body, within this defined realm of space-time. This realization is often the culmination of innumerable births, through which one progresses to the plane of wisdom and enlightenment. Intuition plays a crucial role in this journey, facilitating the realization that everything in existence is an expression of the real self. Along this journey, it is crucial that the mind and intellect, imbued with faith, also possess an intuitive nature.

vīta-rāga-viṣayaṁ vā cittam | svapna-nidrā jñānālambanaṁ vā

Once the *chitta* (deep mind) is freed from attachment, it attains peace. Alternatively, peace can be achieved by focusing on dreams that arise during deep sleep and drawing upon the wisdom of the intuitive insights they bring. **Patanjali Yoga Sutras 1.37–38**

pratibhād-vā sarvam | hṛdaye citta-saṁvit | sattva-puruṣayoḥ-atyantā-śamkīrṇayoḥ pratyayāviśeṣo bhogaḥ parārthatvāt svārthasaṁyamāt puruṣa-jñānam | tataḥ prātibha-śrāvaṇa-vedanā-darśāsvāda-vārtā jāyante | te samādhāv-upasargā vyutthāne siddhayaḥ

Through *samyama* meditation on imagination or intuition, omniscience is manifested. Through *samyama* meditation over the heart, consciousness itself becomes known. Worldly enjoyment arises when one is unable to distinguish between the material manifestation and the original self (*Purusha*), which are, however, completely different. When, in the practice of *samyama* meditation, one is able to distinguish the interest of the original self from the external interests, the wisdom of the self (*Purusha-jnana*) arises. The result is the unfolding of intuitive hearing, perception, sight, taste, and smell. These powers are of secondary importance to those who have already attained the wisdom of *samadhi*, but are undoubtedly important in the worldly state. **Patanjali Yoga Sutras 3.33–38**

According to Bergson, concrete reality encompasses living, conscious beings embedded in inorganic matter. Living beings are characterized by duration, as they continuously bring forth new developments. Without the conscious and living elements, the universe would be a place where successive states are predictable. However, reality, in its essence, unfolds organically, with time serving as a tool for this unfolding. Time introduces delays and is not just about things being simultaneously given; it is an integral part of the creative process, allowing for choice and underscoring the indeterminacy inherent in creation. We directly perceive and feel our capacity to create intentions, choices, actions, and thus shape our habits, character, and our very selves, suggesting that things are not predestined. This understanding allows us to redefine our relationship with the world, to connect with the self rooted in transcendence, and to value the inner content that deserves our attention and reliance. While our knowledge about our creative capacity may be limited, we can focus our attention on the act of creation, its methods, and tools, and be actively present in the process. Ordinary cognition tends to extract a sense of static constancy and regularity from the dynamic flow of reality. By reversing this typical cognitive direction and reflecting on the process itself, we can grasp the essence of creation and our capacity to be creators.

The intellect is drawn to regularity and constancy in what is constant and regular in reality, that is, in materiality, thus touching only one aspect of the absolute. In contrast, our real self engages with the other side, grasping a constant change and novelty within us, or expanding to identify with nature's innovative efforts. Reality is characterized by duration, continuous growth, and gradual discovery, forming a totality that is ceaselessly full and knows no void. One aspect of reality fades

only to be replaced by another. We, through our intellect, often perceive this transition as a cessation, noticing only the change and neglecting what has passed away. This approach results from the mistaken belief that the absence of a former state leads to a void, where the former state was once complete. In this view, the potential (the new) seems less substantial than the existing reality. Bergson challenges this notion, suggesting that in the entirety of concrete reality – the world of life and the real self – there is more potential in all possible states than in their actual realization. It is not the potential that morphs into reality; rather, it is reality that enables its own possibilities. This perspective transforms the notion of progress from simply fulfilling a predetermined plan to an opening into infinite freedom. The potential is deeply rooted in reality, and it is the freedom of the real self that gives rise to new possibilities. We have reason to celebrate, for reality continuously reinvents itself in front of our eyes. As creators of our own existence, we actively participate in this grand process of creation – a perspective that can be described as "true living".[143]

When we combine reason and intuition in our quest for knowledge, we access an effective method for exploring life. Bergson sought a philosophy that would reintegrate reason into intuition, thereby resolving contradictions. He believed this fusion not only empowers us to live and act but also offers an opportunity to overcome our isolation. According to Bergson, while rationality seeks to predict the future and dominate events, symbolizing and humanizing reality, it merely reflects true reality, not presenting it in its entirety. Intuition, on the other hand, moves beyond the intellect's tendency to dissect, enabling a more holistic embrace of true reality. Consequently, truth can be accessed through not just speculative, systematic thought but also through direct observation and enlightening, instantaneous experiences. While Bergson's theories were grounded in the scientific knowledge of his time, the evolution of science, especially quantum physics, has lent support to his broader ideas. Additionally, the enduring traditions of India, with their rich and authentic explorations of reason, intuition, and their connection to the transcendent, provide a complementary and contextual framework for his insights. Bergson's dismissal of the intellect's lower functions as genuine modes of cognition doesn't exclude the possibility of a relationship between intuition and a higher functioning of the intellect.[144]

In a brief look towards quantum mechanics, we observe that Bergson, in his book *Matter and Memory* (written 30 years before the advent of quantum mechanics), had already anticipated concepts of quantum matter. He posited that particles possess a holistic nature, matter is not solid, and the simultaneous determination of a body's motion and position is impossible. Furthermore, he suggested that physical processes are not bound by strict necessity. Bergson delved into the relationship between mind and matter, noting that perception is the mind's alignment with matter, sensation is a synthesis of transient memory moments, and consciousness operates on multiple levels. He proposed that matter comprises a conglomerate of images or diverse characteristics, leading to several conclusions: matter is

not just an assembly of distinct elements but exhibits a certain degree of separation (extension); it constitutes movements, not static entities; each moment forms an indivisible whole; and material changes are marked by a minimal level of unpredictability. This stemmed from his intuitive understanding that perception doesn't capture solid objects, but rather a flux of changing qualities in a continuous, indivisible movement.[145]

2. The Depths of Intuition

The nature, value and application of intuition – The psychology of self-perfection

Valéria Dienes, a student of Bergson, offers a rich exploration of the concept of intuition, intertwining Bergson's doctrines with her own, direct insights. Her approach to intuition, presented in the coming pages, is multifaceted, examining its nature as an epistemological question, its value as a metaphysical question, and its application as a scientific question. This comprehensive view reflects her deep knowledge and experience, shedding light on both the theoretical and practical aspects of intuition.

Regarding the nature of intuition, Dienes recognizes the inherent contradictions and complexities in trying to articulate this concept through conventional language and concepts. Intuition represents a mental act where the mind transcends the familiar terrain of structured and fragmented realities to tap into a deeper source. It aims to access a realm beyond conventional conceptualization, reaching for a substance that eludes verbal expression. It is inherently experiential, complete in its content, and exists beyond the confines of words. The conceptualizing mind faces challenges when it attempts to analyse and juxtapose intuitive insights. These insights, drawn from the same source, manifest in diverse forms and cannot always be synthesized coherently under conventional definitions. However, the mind has capacity to recognize and engage with these experiences, thereby illuminating the differences and similarities among various intuitions.

Intuition is a process that engages with realities beyond the external demands of everyday life. It contrasts with descriptive, analytical, and structured knowledge typically associated with the intellect, which is shaped by the need for action. The intellect's role is to extract and utilize aspects of reality for practical purposes, highlighting elements of reality that can be incorporated into action. When contemplation is directed toward matter, it becomes intellectual intuition, which, in conjunction with analytical tools, prepares for action. This form of intuition aligns with the material aspect of reality. In contrast, when contemplation is directed towards life and consciousness,

intuition becomes a deeper, more experiential form of cognition. Here, the analytical tools of the intellect may become less effective, as intuition seeks to grasp the essence of life and consciousness beyond mere surface analysis.

Intuition is distinct from an unexpressed or unformed consciousness. It starts with an intention that is more than a mere impression and makes the intuitive experience an end in itself. The value of reality becomes a crucial aspect of this process. The varied insights from the depths of consciousness are not inherently equal; their significance is determined through their interaction with other realities. In this context, unconscious suggestions or conscious revelations can unveil the secrets of the soul, providing access to its realm. This approach to knowledge echoes the mathematical vision of matter, which seeks to align with the immediate reality of matter. Similarly, mystical experience aims to approach the realities of the soul. However, the conscious being cannot fully merge with the rhythm of material existence, and the soul, while embodied in matter, cannot fully identify with the source of spiritual existence.

Intuition is an assimilative process, reflecting the soul's capacity for identification, where the soul can transform into the object of its own cognition. This convergence results in the unity of the subject and object of cognition. Intuition inherently affirms; unlike reason, which is capable of negation, it speaks of existence and asserts the unity of content and container. Its essence is unification, not the expression of otherness or separation. This creates an unbreakable bond of sympathy between the knower and the known, akin to what is termed as "love" in ethics. Intuition transcends the constructed conceptualism of reason, supplementing and enriching the intellect, compensating for its limitations and supplying what is necessary for conceptualization. It connects directly with reality, grasping experiences and identifying with an event-like existence that stands independent of the knower. To access this, one must delve into the immediate, the incomprehensible, the spiritual experience that is reality. The challenge and value of intuition lie in its affirmative nature. It is more challenging to assert truths about reality, as this requires direct contact and immersion in ongoing events, tuning into their dynamic essence. It's simpler to negate or dispute, focusing on what things are not, hesitating to commit to a specific interpretation for fear of contradiction by reality. Furthermore, intuition is not at our command; it doesn't operate at will but follows psychological events and is often fleeting. One must approach cognition and spiritual life with love, embracing the joy found in immersing oneself in reality. Intuition is elusive in description, inexpressible in words, and loses its essence when conceptualized. Thus, conveying it to another is challenging, requiring them to apprehend the living reality behind the spoken words.

Intuition serves as a complement to cognition, permeating our interactions with other consciousnesses and revealing their deepest dynamics. It broadens our understanding in realms where intellectual tools are insufficient, particularly in the spheres of life and consciousness. As a

result, the knowledge gained through intuition carries a tangible reality, unlike cognitions processed through intellectual frameworks. Intuition facilitates a union between the object and the subject, requiring intuitive faculties to initially bridge this gap. It involves a deep intermingling of the mind with the object of contemplation, more than mere perception, memory, or logic. It's a process of unity, where the subject's consciousness actively engages with the object.

During this process, the mind dives into various realities, relishing in this fusion. This can sometimes lead to rigid mental forms, periods of waiting for the right "stream of reality", or moments of misidentification that abruptly bring consciousness back to reality. The compilation of these experiences primes the mind for the spontaneous emergence of intuitive insights. Intuition operates naturally, encompassing a field as vast as the subjects to be understood. It is an integral part of spiritual experience, where the soul reaches beyond the tangible world to connect with the mystical. Through intuition, we also become aware of spiritual truths, divine guidance, and higher wisdom. While not all intuitive experiences are mystical in nature, intuition serves as the channel for all mystical experiences.

In addition, intuition also plays a crucial role in decoding messages from the material world. This occurs during perception, where our consciousness aligns with an aspect of matter, bringing an impression of it into our awareness. This impression points towards a reality beyond the immediate. Memories cluster around this objective centre, rendering the material experience both familiar and individualized. Personal impressions then enrich the intuitive understanding of the material, resulting in a conscious and utilizable perception. This process presents the material in a way that heightens our awareness of its changes and states. The sense organs play a pivotal role here, intuitively picking up vibrations that are then filtered through consciousness. This perceptual intuition becomes a key to understanding matter, correlating with qualities in perception and cognitive processes in thinking. Moreover, the intuitive sense unveils matter's structure, as the constitution of inanimate matter mirrors the divisive nature of our intellect.

This process sheds light on the conflicts between the natures of matter and consciousness. For matter to be intuitively experienced, consciousness must adapt to resemble matter, leading to division, logic, and mathematics. To exert control over matter, consciousness limits its self-perception, giving rise to reason. The real self inherently understands matter in its absolute form, but the means of experiencing it are no longer aligned with the self's original nature. The intellect, a lower manifestation of the powers of consciousness, has evolved for recognizing and manipulating basic realities due to our physical existence. As the nature of matter infiltrates consciousness, reason and logic emerge. These cognitive processes act as barriers when we turn our attention to non-material realities.

The soul stands in stark contrast to matter: it does not understand matter's tendency towards repetitiveness, which is essential for the application of laws. Unlike matter, the soul is a continuously renewing, self-recreating, and non-repetitive reality. It represents an overflowing abundance that transcends its own limits, characterized by compassion, not bound by spatial constraints or dispersion. The soul is defined by individual, experienced time (or duration as Bergson called it) that emerges from the flow of time, with the present extending into the past and future. It exists in harmony with all, pervading every aspect of existence without fragmentation. In contrast, matter is defined by repetition, adherence to laws, conservation of effort, indifference, spatiality, and fragmentation. These traits are essential for the mind's processing and interpretation.

The intersection of the soul and matter is life itself, where the real self merges into matter. Self-knowledge in this realm is primarily an intuitive endeavour, requiring knowledge that is active and not limited by conceptual understanding. This is where consciousness manifests in action – intuition geared towards action, understanding the laws of the universe in a way that transcends logical reasoning. Through intuition, life emerges from matter, as the inner knower penetrates the realm of living matter. The real self propels life from matter, establishing knowledge that becomes integral to conscious, self-aware life. Life then begins to assert dominance over inanimate matter, overcoming its inert nature and evolving into increasingly complex organizational structures, guided by the infinite self's intention. Matter serves the real self, facilitating its breakthrough and aiding in its self-realization. Following a lengthy spiritual journey, a pivotal moment of self-awakening occurs. Humanity emerges, with the body becoming an instrument of freedom, directed by the real self rather than just the instinctive, unconscious spirituality that flows through it.

The experience of embodied consciousness is fundamentally intuitive. While it directs the intellect towards inanimate matter, it possesses the inherent ability to perceive itself, its past, future, and spiritual origins directly. However, when it strays from the real self's guidance, its cognitive clarity diminishes, leading to an experience that is more intellectual and less intuitive. The further it deviates from the real self, the weaker its intuitive function becomes. Consequently, it perceives only inanimate matter, developing a logically coherent science based on it and erroneously applying this limited vision to life, consciousness, the real self, and spiritual existence. This misdirection results in a failure to comprehend and appreciate the existence that transcends matter, leading to spiritual impoverishment.

Despite being equipped in the human form – which evolves through creation and creates through evolution – to serve its spiritual and moral excellence, the real self becomes subservient to materiality. In this subservient state, the intellect, originally intended to understand matter, inappropriately shifts its focus towards the realm of the real self. It dissects and interprets life, which thrives on different forces, as a machine, and confines reality within rigid "isms". The

cognition of the self within the body becomes predominantly intellect-driven and grossly inadequate.

When the self is liberated from bodily constraints, its experiences become free from distortions, resembling the mystical experience. This form of experience is ineffable in its originality, yet clear in content, and surpasses ordinary human knowledge. It is the hallmark of consciousness that aligns with the real self, adopting its nature instead of that of matter. The body, once dominated by the real self, becomes its servant, fulfilling its intentions, overcoming obstacles, and transcending the limitations of the matter-focused intellect. It achieves comprehensive knowledge through experiential identification. Furthermore, the dissemination of knowledge becomes more straightforward, as disembodied individuals are not isolated; their individual perceptions are, in essence, collective. Uninfluenced by reason, intuition is marked by its completeness, clarity, and depth. It is direct and formless, requiring no verbal expression. Intuition draws limitlessly from reality, needing no intermediary tools, offering a vision that is simple yet profound.

We inherently utilize intuition in all forms of cognition, and its development hinges on creating suitable psychological conditions to enrich conscious experiences. Since life's cognition is through action, it's crucial to engage with its rhythm. This engagement renders intuition in action tangible, illuminates the action, and allows the assimilation of reality to evolve into a conscious experience. A consciousness that centres on a specific issue takes into account the existing body of knowledge, explores, assimilates empirical and theoretical understanding, and examines it from diverse perspectives. This process enables the breaking down of conceptual barriers and immerses the consciousness in reality. When these conceptual structures are dismantled, identification and unity with reality occur unimpeded, leading to a receipt of reality, and the resultant knowledge integrates into the intellect. This outcome is not merely a fusion of typical, static, and lifeless knowledge but a visualization and systematization of the living. To enhance receptiveness to consciousness, certain practices are vital:

- Cultivating independence from words and concepts, ensuring the experience remains consistent despite varied forms of expression.
- The converse involves retrieving the reality and experiential essence of conceptualized knowledge. This approach facilitates understanding others' intuitions, focusing on the reality's content rather than its expression.
- Developing empathy and transmitting knowledge experientially (beyond words), which the recipient's awareness then articulates.

- Fostering independence in experiential learning to make memory, imagination, perception, and learning more intuitive.
- Engaging in scientific and metaphysical research offers opportunities for practical application of these concepts.

Thus, a philosophy that consciously employs intuition displays specific characteristics:

- It seeks reality's touchpoints, assertions, and testimonies.
- Concepts and systems are regarded as research tools (rather than end goals), channelling consciousness into desired contacts.
- It draws on experiences from varied sources, valuing their essence over form.
- Such a philosophy cherishes truth for its own sake, recognizing that knowledge is a collective asset. Consequently, it becomes our shared responsibility to cultivate a deepening understanding of self and the world, guided by converging consciousnesses.[146]

The yoga tradition centres on the cultivation of awareness regarding realms and states beyond our current consciousness. These higher states are not isolated but interdependent, acting as ascendant forces. From these elevated realms, spiritual force influences our being, enabling the descent of higher consciousness into our physical existence. The mind, in this transformative journey, engages with dynamic forces that facilitate its refinement. At the peak of this self-transformation lies the concept of the "supramental" or "supermind" – the apex of gnosis. Intuition plays a pivotal role here, inherently linked to primal knowledge. It reveals truth in sudden, illuminating insights, transforming these revelations into intuitive ideas. Intuition is a beam of supramental light, and in the mind translates into spontaneous understandings, inspirations, acute discernment, and clarity. It represents a form of direct truth perception – seeing, hearing, recalling, or immediately grasping the truth.

The consciousness of the subject intersects with that of the object in this process. It delves into the object's essence, discerning and resonating with the truth embedded within. When the real self turns its gaze inward, it profoundly senses the truth or connects with the concealed forces behind phenomena. This intuitive layer is situated just above the mind, where thought-based knowledge (higher mind) is experienced, followed by enlightened knowledge (illumined mind). Above these is the realm of intuition, offering direct and sharp perception. It's crucial to differentiate this from the faculty of mental intellect, which often arrives at conclusions in a single, rapid leap, bypassing the typical sequential steps of logical reasoning.

Supramental consciousness, or the supermind, is true consciousness, free from all ignorance. Its course is straight, it reaches its goal directly, and its scope is vast and capable of becoming limitless. It stands above and behind the mind, and differs from the various planes of the mind (ordinary, higher, illuminated, intuition), since within these knowledge and ignorance may still be mixed. This is the foundation of our being: our nature seeks to know itself and the world through it, and on this basis strives for its proper mode of functioning. It does not proceed from the unknown or from ignorance toward imperfect light; rather, it moves from truth to greater truth, from right understanding to deeper understanding, from intuition to intuition, from illumination to boundless radiance, from ever-expanding vastness into the infinite.

As spiritual aspirants draw nearer to transcendental existence, this higher consciousness begins to manifest within them. It descends as a transformative force, awakening faculties, inspirations, and intuitions previously dormant. The nature of this wisdom, when contrasted with the workings of the mind and intellect, becomes even more pronounced.

Mental intellect	**Supramental wisdom (gnosis)**
It moves from ignorance to truth.	It is in direct contact with the truth, spontaneous, perceives it immediately, possesses it constantly, and has no need to search for it.
It starts from and depends on apparent phenomena, thus seeking to reach the truth and consequently presents it in light of these observations.	It starts from the truth and shows appearances in the light of it.
It operates through imagination.	It operates through the inspiration of truth.
It involves making a mental decision.	It makes spontaneous distinctions.
Its process is slow and logical, moving from reasoning to conclusion.	The process is fast and intuitive.
It deals with components, processes, and characteristics, and through these, it tries to build a picture of a thing.	Wisdom sees the thing in itself, penetrates into its intrinsic nature, and connects its characteristics as expressions of this nature.
It dwells in diversity, is a prisoner of it, treats things as separate entities, sees time in stages, and space in parts.	It dwells in unity and perceives the diversity within unity.

The intuitive mind is capable of performing the work of reason through intuition, inspiration, revelatory vision, and discernment, doing so quickly, spontaneously, and with great accuracy. Intuition is an extension of wisdom into the mind, marking the beginning of its entry. Wisdom can be likened to the Sun, which sees in its own light the truth of things (such as mind, life-force, and matter) that dwell in its rays. In contrast, mental consciousness exists within these rays, perceiving truth by reflection and being limited by mental vision and lower faculties. On the plane of realized wisdom, our human nature becomes divine, transforming indirect human knowledge into direct divine knowledge. The thought process of the intuitive mind operates through four forces:

- Suggestive intuition, which presents ideas.
- Discriminating intuition, which differentiates and discerns.
- Inspiration, which imparts its word and a part of its higher substance.
- Revelation, which adapts its essence and reality to our vision.

From these higher movements also arise their mental variants, such as intellectual intuition, the swift deductions of the thinking intellect, actions inspired by the vivid imaginative intellect, and the light of mental direct grasping and experiencing. These can easily be confused with intuition. To the ordinary mind, the intellect may appear to belong to a very high realm, but in comparison to these higher planes, it is merely one of the ordinary faculties of the mind. Living on these higher planes is rare, as even to attain intuition, one must free the mind and life-force from their own will, preferences, ideas, and attachments, and exclude the mental ego's inclination to subordinate consciousness to its own desires. Otherwise, these faculties may present themselves as intuition, and true intuition may be distorted by merging with ignorance. The intellect always attempts to mimic higher nature in its own imperfect way, relying on perception and accumulated knowledge, and seeking truth externally. In contrast, intuitive knowledge provides immediate, enduring, and self-existent certainty.

If we wish to move towards reality, we must withdraw our thinking inward because through it, we disperse ourselves into the world of phenomena. This process is known as concentration, which possesses several powers to help us achieve this objective. We have the ability to know anything because we can use our total will to grasp things beyond ourselves. Therefore, we can also employ this power to know the Absolute. Furthermore, we can become whatever we desire by concentrating our entire being on a specific state of self.

In yoga, our goal is not only to attain the Absolute but also its manifestation as infinite existence, consciousness, and bliss as it encompasses the universe. Consequently, we do not need to sever our consciousness of the universe; instead, we can strive to realize the true self within the universe and then transcend it. Through concentration, we can identify with and enter into any form, state, or psychological manifestation of the true self. This concentration is achieved by using the idea of thought, form, and name as keys to access the truth behind them. In this way, our mental existence removes the obstacles to thinking, attaining a state of consciousness and being, and the entire being becomes unified.

The mind is scattered and successive, capable of concentrating on one thing at a time; otherwise, it jumps randomly from one thing to another. Therefore, it must concentrate on a single idea to possess it to the exclusion of all others. What we aim to reach is higher than the process of thinking or the division of ideas. The Divine is centred in itself, not dividing or enclosing itself within the ideas and activities it emanates but holding them and their movement within its own infinity. Its undivided and complete being stands behind all ideas and movements, encompassing all of them together. Its reality is free and spontaneous action in unity and infinity. The goal of our concentration is to attain the solidified divine state (*samadhi*), which is the opposite of mentality – it is truth itself, self-fulfilment, and spontaneous knowledge without the need for concentration. We must train the wandering mind to engage in the unwavering pursuit of a stream of interconnected thoughts on a single object. While we do this easily in everyday life, to know reality, it is essential to master this inward operation without an external object or action.[147]

3. Creative and Subjective Evolution

Contemplation and free action – Perception of states of consciousness: waking state, dream and dreamless deep sleep – The highest state of consciousness beyond these three

As Bergson states: "Consciousness and matter appear to us as radically different forms of existence, even as antagonistic forms, which have to find a modus vivendi (a reconciliation). Matter is necessity, consciousness is freedom; but though diametrically opposed to one another, life has found the way of reconciling them. This is precisely what life is – freedom inserting itself within necessity, turning it to its profit. [...] Things have happened just as though an immense current of consciousness, interpenetrated with potentialities of every kind, had traversed matter to draw it towards organization and make it, notwithstanding that it is necessity itself, an instrument of freedom."[148]

The subject is free, feels freedom, and experiences it. True freedom of action occurs when one chooses oneself. Through purposeful and utilitarian actions, individuals create their inner spiritual balance and maintain continuous adaptation to reality. The subject is conscious and possesses an essence, influenced by memories of the past, experiences of the present, and expectations of the future. However, these factors do not determine or reduce the subject to mechanical patterns. Consciousness and memory represent the mental dimension of reality, fundamentally distinct from matter, yet their existence is interdependent, and they interact cooperatively. Perception and memory are complementary processes.[149] It is essential to note that free will is not synonymous with free choice, which entails selecting from available options or the feeling that a different choice should have been made. Instead, free will embodies the true nature of individual life, reflecting its uniqueness. Actions, including creative and free ones, are not independent of our character. In daily life, many actions, such as thoughts and speech, are highly automatic and do not necessarily express higher consciousness.[150]

From the expansive perspective of yoga, freedom or living in higher consciousness is characterized by possessing all of one's inherent faculties and having the freedom to utilize them without limitations. It entails being free from the fear of death because the Absolute plane is characterized by attributes such as eternity, omniscience, completeness, and bliss. True freedom is not merely doing what the Absolute or the real self wants, but the ability to manifest all its faculties through oneself, living in harmony with it, and taking any action accordingly. For the Absolute, nothing is impossible or meaningless, and the same holds true for individuals. "Nature warns us by a clear sign that our destination is attained. That sign is joy. I mean joy, not pleasure. Pleasure is only a contrivance devised by nature to obtain for the creature the preservation of its life, it does not indicate the direction in which life is thrusting. But joy always announces that life has succeeded, gained ground, conquered. All great joy has a triumphant note."[151]

The capacity for contemplation and openness to transcendence is an inherent gift of every human being, representing a universal human ability. This capacity allows individuals to attain complete independence and a state of being without necessity. The counterpoint to the individual experience of autonomy and freedom is the subjection of inorganic things to causality. In other words, while individuals have the potential for autonomy and freedom, inorganic things and processes are typically governed by deterministic causal laws. Autonomy and freedom are psycho-spiritual experiences that are accessible to all and are closely related to the state of contemplation, which is a state of deep inner reflection and connection with higher realities. Intuition, which is a gift of contemplative individuals, enables them to access a deeper understanding of the underlying reality that cannot be reached through rational means. Contemplation is the pursuit of a joyful life, and it serves as the ultimate goal of human existence. Each moment in time, subjectively experienced,

becomes a unique and entirely new experience. Intuition unfolds gradually over time, rooted in the world yet providing a profound spiritual experience. This unfolding, driven by the life impulse, is marked by a sense of the need to create.

Bergson analyzes the spiritually rooted process of the life impulse (*élan vital*), examined and explained through metaphysical means, in several of his works: from a psychological perspective in *Time and Free Will*, in terms of the relationship between body and soul in *Matter and Memory*, and from the standpoint of the creative power of consciousness in *Creative Evolution*. His ultimate conclusion is that this is a dynamic spiritual event, mystical and experiential rather than intellectual, which is not a spiritual process withdrawing from the world, but rather one of action. Thus, mystical experience is an impulse or momentum, and not an intellectual revelation, not a contemplative mode of vision, not an emotional outpouring. It cannot be expressed in the language of the intellect; instead, its essence is revealed through the lives and deeds of mystics, since they are all people of action, and it is precisely this that conveys the effect or impetus. [152]

Direct contemplation of life is a liberating process that excludes mechanical actions, yet it is not devoid of action itself. Bergson emphasizes that "...what we do depends on what we are; but it is necessary to add also that we are, to a certain extent, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually."[153] This continuous process of self-creation is marked by unpredictability and exists within subjective time, which allows for novelty and precludes repetition. In contrast, reason seeks to recreate from what already exists and tends to reject the new and the creative, as it does not readily embrace the unforeseeable.

The possibility of creation is also the possibility of human liberation (subjective evolution); at the same time, its explanation requires a form of knowledge that surpasses the planned, discursive functioning of the mind. Understanding creation is of great importance because it allows us to differentiate between things and actions, quantity and quality, the divisible and the indivisible, and the intelligible from the volitional. Everything in existence is marked by continuous formation and the process of becoming something new. Freedom in our experiences becomes possible when we move beyond mere necessity, mechanism, and automatism, and instead awaken consciousness. This awakening is akin to the moment of "waking up." It occurs when our cognition is liberated from the constraints of cause-and-effect correlations and gives way to the freedom of intuition.

In this context, the notion of time, specifically subjective time or duration (*durée* as termed by Bergson), plays a crucial role. Subjective time is experienced internally and subjectively and cannot be measured or standardized. The experience of subjective time is a psychological law that is accessible to all individuals. It represents the potential for attentiveness to life, which is the human race's way of being attentive to the world. Contemplatives can readily explore this aspect of

subjective time by turning their attention inward, particularly to the functioning of memory. In a state of consciousness, memories are not mere static traces of past events confined to a past-present-future framework. Instead, they serve as the foundation for dynamic events. Consciousness operates at the boundary between matter and soul, flowing between the two and being triggered by presence, thus connecting it to events in a profound way.

Contemplation involves a complex and multifaceted awareness of life, as it allows for the recognition of multiple memories. Subjective time serves as the dimension of this consciousness in which one intuitively perceives life within their spiritual world, mood, and state of consciousness. As Valéria Dienes emphasizes, "The spiritual crisis that individuals and entire cultures experience is a common thread that runs through human existence. For some individuals, this crisis may mark the limit of their personal life, while for entire communities and cultures, it can define the boundaries of historical ages. This shared spiritual crisis what the thinker (Bergson) experienced, as exemplified by his solitude in Clermont. At its core, this crisis represents a final reckoning with the forgetting of the spiritual foundations of existence. It serves as a rejection of the mechanistic worldview that blindly emulates scientific theories and the materialistic mindset that anchors the human spirit solely in earthly matters."[154] The extent to which freedom manifests in a community depends on the degree to which it is realized at the individual level. In other words, the collective freedom of a community is closely linked to the individual freedom of its members.[155]

What is realized within the realm of duration, in conscious and flowing presence, is the free and the creative. It is the domain of the real because it creates from itself, essentially making itself possible. In contrast, the intellect operates through inference; it sees a possibility, then seeks to realize it. However, what it brings into existence was already implicit in the initial possibility, so it does not create something genuinely new. As Bergson puts it, "For the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind, which throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted."[156] This means that the real precedes the possible, and only in retrospect do we may say that something was possible. However it is the continuous flow of conscious reality that unfolds, enriching itself and generating novelty. The possible, in this sense, represents an "ideal pre-existence" projected backward from the real. This projection makes the past appear as the potential for a present that could have occurred but did not. Freedom, then, is often framed as a choice between possibilities, but it is a reduction from the realization of genuine novelty to rearranging elements of the old into new configurations. "It is the real that makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real."[157] In truth, the reality of life is the continuous production of novelty. Life's essence lies in duration, which perpetually finds new expressions. Life is characterized by an ongoing quest and exploration because it unfolds within a time of constant renewal. Predictable changes are more

typical of the repetitive patterns in the inorganic world. Intellectual cognition tends to filter out and isolate these repetitive elements, forming regularities and general ideas from them.

Studying Bergson's philosophy offers a personal and inward experience of the evolution of consciousness. Biological evolution is an outward expression of the evolution of consciousness on increasingly advanced planes of manifested existence. Creative evolution, as proposed by Bergson, involves the evolution of the real self, starting from the primordial unconscious and leading to the emergence of motionless and inanimate matter, followed by the manifestation of life in higher forms such as plants, animals, and ultimately, humans. In the human being, reason attains a degree of freedom, but this is not the endpoint of the evolution of consciousness.

Philosophy, in the context of this perspective, is an endeavour to transcend the limitations of the human condition. According to the philosophy of the *Vedas*, there are planes of consciousness beyond the human level, including the plane of all-embracing wisdom based on intuitive knowledge (the supramental plane or gnosis), and even higher planes of bliss related to the pure self. These planes are expressions of the transcendental Self that exists beyond them. The opening of the "eye of wisdom" through inner conscious work leads to an experiential perception that goes beyond mere theoretical understanding. This perception reveals the impermanent nature of material reality, indicating that the subtle and gross material worlds cannot be the ultimate Reality or Truth. This process of realization is referred to as subjective evolution.[158]

yathā prakāśayaty ekaḥ kṛtsnaṁ lokam imaṁ raviḥ
kṣetraṁ kṣetrī tathā kṛtsnaṁ prakāśayati bhārata

Just as the singular Sun illuminates the entire solar system, so does the lord of the field (body), the real self, illuminate all bodies with consciousness. **Bhagavad Gita 13.34**

tasya ha vā etasyaivam pasyata evam manvānasya evam
vijānataḥ ātmatah prāṇa ātmata āsā ātmatah smara ātmata
ākāśa ātmatas teja ātmata āpa ātmata āvirbhāva-tirobhāvau
ātmato 'nnam ātmato balam ātmato vijñānaṁ ātmato dhyānam
ātmatas cittam ātmatah saṅkalpaḥ ātmato manah ātmato vāg
ātmato nāma ātmato mantrā ātmatah
karmāny ātmata evadam sarvam iti

The one who perceives, thinks, and understands all this in full detail, sees the life-force manifesting from the real self (*Atman*). Memory, space, fire, water, manifestation, and annihilation, food,

power, wisdom, contemplative meditation, consciousness, will, mind, speech, mantra, and action all stem from the real self. In fact, everything is of the real self. **Chhandogya Upanishad 7.26.1**

According to the tradition, human experience is divided into three main planes or states:

- In the waking state (gross physical plane), an individual's consciousness is directed outward. It operates and perceives through the senses (of action and knowledge), the five vital forces (*prana*) and various inner senses like the mind, intellect, limited self (ego), and the deeper mind (subconscious). In this state, consciousness receives stimuli from the external world through the senses and responds to them in various ways.
- In the dream state (subtle physical plane), an individual's consciousness is directed inward. The perceiver in this state is the imaginative self, which exists in a subtle material body during dreams. This state is characterized by the nature of light, allowing it to function even in the absence of external objects. It knows and experiences subtle, inner objects through consciousness. Even though performed awake, and not asleep, imagination or daydreaming also belong to the dream state.
- In the state of deep sleep (causal plane), there are no objects present, either external worldly things or internal ideas. This state transcends duality, which is still present in the previous two planes. The experiencer in deep sleep is the individual form of the original self. It is characterized by the absence of definite knowledge and the presence of pure bliss and pure consciousness. It represents direct perception, soul experience, and the experience of the Absolute.

Beyond these three states, there is a fourth state known as *turiya*, which is considered the inherent state of the real self and pervades all three planes of experience. It is a state of profound consciousness that transcends ordinary waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states.

Consciousness is considered the symptom of existence, and within consciousness, there exists the subtle symptom of the desire for bliss. This desire for eternal bliss is attributed to the spiritual nature (*Atman*) within individuals, which seeks to transcend the limitations of the individual personality or physical body. The human being is seen as a kind of thinking laboratory where the Absolute is actively working out its own manifestation. All the various paths, wills, and efforts of individuals are regarded as part of this divine plan. This process is often referred to as subjective evolution, which involves progressing from *karma* (the cycle of action and consequence) to *samadhi* (a state of deep meditation or union with the divine).

The central arena for this liberating and self-realizing struggle is the human mind itself. The mind tends to perceive itself as separate from the soul, other beings, and the source of all things. This sense of separateness is considered a form of ignorance, and the goal of yoga is to regulate the mind so that it doesn't reinforce these attachments but instead works toward liberating the soul from this misconception. In the philosophy of yoga, all living beings and their actions interact with two fundamental principles: the soul (*Purusha*) and its nature (*Prakriti*). The essential nature of this interaction, the spiritual realization needed for the soul's liberation from its outward attachments to the world, and the path toward inner equilibrium are key topics explored in yoga philosophy.

The realization of one's own spiritual nature involves an understanding of the divisions that exist within consciousness and the objects perceived. Our experience is essentially a combination of forms that are illuminated by the light of consciousness. At the initial stages of this journey, the eternal Atman (the true self) finds itself embodied in the realm of material nature (*Prakriti*). Within this context, the individual soul undergoes a triple-division of selfhood: The soul, influenced by ignorance, identifies itself with the ever-changing personality. This personality encompasses thoughts, actions, and movements, and it represents the fundamental functioning of *Prakriti*, the material nature. As the soul delves deeper, it begins to discern the essence of movement and action that underlies the entire system. It discovers its own higher reality, which is the eternal Self (*Purusha*). The *Purusha* is unchanging, indestructible, and immutable. It serves as the undisturbed witness and the true guide within. Beyond the dualism of *Prakriti* (nature) and *Purusha* (real self), the individual soul glimpses a universal reality that transcends them both, and is the source of both. This universal reality is the eternal, completely independent, self-existent Lord, the Absolute. This Lord is the master of all aspects of nature, all actions, and all existence. It is the source of all dynamic and static components and energies in the universe, and it possesses omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence.

arjuna uvāca: prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva kṣetraṁ kṣetra-jñam eva ca
etad veditum icchāmi jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ ca keśava
śrī-bhagavān uvāca: idaṁ śarīraṁ kaunteya kṣetram ity abhidhīyate
etad yo vetti taṁ prāhuḥ kṣetra-jña iti tad-vidaḥ
kṣetra-jñaṁ cāpi māṁ viddhi sarva-kṣetreṣu bhārata
kṣetra-kṣetrajñayor jñānaṁ yat taj jñānaṁ mataṁ mama

Arjuna said, "I wish to understand *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, the nature of the field and the knower of the field, as well as the essence of knowledge and the object of knowledge, O Keshava."

The gracious Lord replied, "The body is referred to as the 'field,' and the one who comprehends this field is known as the 'knower of the field' by those who are truly wise. Understand that I am (God) the universal knower in all bodies. True knowledge involves understanding both the nature of this body and its knower. This is my view." **Bhagavad Gita 13.1–3**

The practice of yoga is a systematic journey towards the revelation of the profound reality that resides within each individual. At the core of this lies the state of witness consciousness (*samadhi*), where the practitioner perceives the same Absolute in all that is in motion and all that is at rest. It is an awakening to the recognition that even the simplest of life forms, every animate and inanimate entity is fundamentally grounded in this divine consciousness. As one delves deeper into the practice of yoga, they come to realize that the true self residing within their own heart (not the physical organ but the energetic centre in the chest) is not only the guiding force of their individual human existence but is also the guiding force behind the vast cosmic body of the universe itself.[159]

The Divine expresses itself in human lives and nature through three fundamental powers: will, knowledge, and love. These three powers also represent distinct paths through which the human soul can ascend towards the divine. Since individuals inherently utilize these powers to varying degrees in their daily lives, the imperative to integrate and synthesize them becomes self-evident. By harmoniously merging these powers and incorporating them into all facets of life, one can attain union with the Divine through each of these three paths. Each path is incomplete without the others, and their synergy creates a profound and transformative way that leads to a deeper connection with the divine presence.

Action is the foundational force of life, and it naturally transforms into will and its outcomes. By aligning one's actions with the divine, life begins to take on a divine quality. The will within the individual becomes harmonized with the divine will, and all actions originate from and are directed towards the divine. This union in action signifies becoming one with the omniscient being from whom all will and action emanate. It is the ultimate merging of individual will with the divine will. The action becomes complete in knowledge, as the *Bhagavad Gita* states, "The sacrifice of knowledge is superior to the sacrifice of material things. Ultimately, all sacrifices of action culminate in wisdom." (4.33) Thus, approached from the standpoint of action, the triple unity is such that through unity in will and action, we become one with the omniscient being from whom all our will and actions arise, gain strength, and are fulfilled. The culmination of this is love, the joy of conscious union with God in whom we live, act, and move, and by whom we exist. And finally, we learn to act and live for and by It alone.

Through knowledge, we can enter the divine, which approaches us in many aspects, and this is the basis of life in God. Consciousness is the basis of life, and knowledge is the operation of that consciousness; light by which we are conscious of ourselves, power by which we retain the results of thought from action and act in the growth of our conscious being until it is fulfilled in the unity, in the infinity of the divine being. Conscious oneness with It is attained, and this oneness gives full and true knowledge – we take It into ourselves, It takes possession of us, and thus our divisions and limitations are removed. Approached from the point of view of knowledge, the triple unity shows that knowledge cannot be complete without action, since the will in being is also God, and knowledge finds its fulfilment in action. Love is the culmination of knowledge, the joy of union, and it is through the awareness of this that it finds its own fulfilment. Perfect knowledge leads to perfect love, and comprehensive knowledge leads to the full and manifold richness of love.

yo mām evam asammūḍho jānāti puruṣottamam
sa sarva-vid bhajati māṁ sarva-bhāvena bhārata

One, who unerringly recognizes that I am the Supreme Self (*Purushottama*), is all-knowing, and worships me with their entire being and heart. **Bhagavad Gita 15.19**

bhaktyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yaś cāsmi tattvataḥ
tato māṁ tattvato jñātvā viśate tad-anantaram

Through one's devotion, one can comprehend my true nature (*tattva*), understanding who and what I truly am (God); this genuine knowledge of me is attained when one unites with me. **Bhagavad Gita 18.55**

Love is the force that elevates existence to its highest intensity, fullness, and to the joy of self-discovery. If consciousness itself is the essence of Being, and through perfect knowledge, we attain oneness with it, then the inherent nature of consciousness is bliss. Love is the key and the secret to unlocking this blissful nature. Furthermore, if the will is the power of conscious existence through which it realizes its purpose, and through the union of will, we merge with the Being in its power, then all actions driven by this power are born from, exist within, aim for, and culminate in happiness. From the perspective of love, the triple unity can be understood as follows: When love is infused with knowledge, it becomes limitless, joyfully engaging in actions directed towards the Divine, who is present in all things. Through this harmonious union of love and knowledge, we discover the fulfilment of our own being in the divine rapture of the Supreme Being.[160]

VI. Experiencing the Ultimate Reality

1. Source of Consciousness

The various manifestations of consciousness – Reconciliation of real self and matter and its shortcomings in materialism and religion – Omnipresent reality

Bergson's conception of reality is fundamentally grounded in the idea of uninterrupted movement and flow, characterized by freedom. This unceasing flow is apprehended through intuition, revealing the true essence of all manifested things. At the heart of this concept lies motion, or transformation, which forms the basic imagery of reality. Bergson identifies two facets of this reality: pure motion and reverse motion. In its primal form, reality is a pure flow. However, this flow sometimes undergoes reversal or interruption, leading to the emergence of matter. Thus, matter is a product derived from the pure flow of reality. The life impulse, which is the conscious movement of the Absolute, is inherent in all forms of existence, with the evolution of consciousness essentially being a journey back to pure movement.[161]

Intuition, which is the instrument for understanding reality, is supplemented, with the emergence of matter, by the functions of intellect and instinct, which serve orientation within matter. Intelligence accomplishes this by means of artificial instruments (mind, senses, etc.), whereas instinct does so through organic instruments. The advantage of instinct is that it is far more precise and certain, while the advantage of intelligence is that it is practically limitless. Intelligence came into being simultaneously with the creation of matter in order to be able to govern it. And matter, as a derivative of reality, cannot be a reality independent of its source. Movement itself is continuous creation, while matter is merely a snapshot of this movement, or its momentary arrest. With this, Bergson attempted to pass from becoming to being—intuition is the instrument for the knowledge of being, and for the transition from the world of becoming into the world of being. Development takes place both outwardly and inwardly, because things and beings strive for perfection, for the attainment of their source; and since the Absolute has transformed itself into every plane and every creature of creation, it is present both outside and within. Evolution thus has a goal toward which it proceeds systematically, and which is directed by supreme consciousness.

The Vedic tradition and its masters have discerned that one state of reality is existence, and another is transformation. Beyond these states lies the supreme reality, the Absolute. However, this ultimate reality cannot be fully grasped in itself; thus, we must reconcile with the duality of motion

in space and time and pure existence beyond space and time. According to Sri Aurobindo, the supreme reality is eternal, absolute, and infinite. To our consciousness, it manifests as eternal existence (*Sat*), consciousness and its power (*Chit-Shakti*), and the joy of existence (*Ananda*). These three forms of its self-existence are the self (*Atman*), the conscious being (*Purusha*), and God or Divine existence (*Ishwara*).

The awareness of the self and its power also takes three forms: *Maya*, the power of absolute consciousness, conceptualizes all creation; *Prakriti*, the dynamic power or nature (the power of the conscious being or *Purusha*), which actualizes all creation; and *Shakti*, the conscious power (the power of the Divine being or *Ishwara*) that both conceptualizes and realizes dynamically. These three aspects and forces encompass the totality of existence and nature. When considered collectively, they reconcile all apparent contradictions and disparities between the transcendence above the cosmic, the universal existence, and individual existence. What appears miraculous to the finite mind is foundational and logical to the infinite.

As Sri Aurobindo posits, in the supreme Reality, the one and the many, the static and the dynamic, the infinite and the finite, coexist naturally and inevitably. The finite cannot exist independently; it exists within and through the infinite. However, the infinite is not merely an unbounded expansion in space and time; it also transcends time and space, existing in and of itself. This mathematics of the Absolute is articulated in the literature of the *Upanishads* as follows:

oṁ pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate

The Invisible Absolute, or *Brahman*, is inherently perfect and complete. This perfection ensures that its emanation, the visible universe, also embodies completeness and perfection. Consequently, even though countless perceivable entities originate from the Absolute, *Brahman* perpetually retains its state of unchanging completeness and perfection. **Ishavasya Upanishad Invocation**

In the creation of diversity, the infinite remains unchanged; it continues to be the same supreme One as it was originally. The energy of *Brahman* embodies both the allure and the logic of an infinitely diverse unity. The power of consciousness is intrinsically linked to the power of infinite reality and is not separate from it. Its primary manifestation is the power of infinite self-transformation and self-revolution. This allows it to exist as numerous entities simultaneously and perform a variety of movements, which may seem contradictory to our finite understanding. Another aspect of infinite consciousness is the power of self-manifestation and self-limitation.

Through this, it gives rise to lower movements within the realm of infinite consciousness. The development of mind, life-force, and matter as independent entities is also a result of this self-limiting power. The third force is that of withdrawal and immersion into the self, leading to a state of stillness where self-consciousness exists not as knowledge but as a condition. The final critical component of this threefold reality is happiness or bliss. This state is both the cause of the world's manifestation and the reason for its creation.

asadvā idamagra āsīt, tato vai sadajāyata, tadātmānaṁ
svayamakuruta, tasmāttatsukṛtamucyata iti
yadvai tat sukṛtam, raso vai saḥ,
rasaṁ hyevāyaṃ labdhvānandī bhavati, ko
hyevānyātkaḥ prāṇyāt, yadeṣa ākāśa ānando na syāt, eṣa hyevānandayāti
yadā hyevaiṣa etasminnadṛśye'nātmye'nirukte'nilayane'bhayaṃ
pratiṣṭhāṃ vindate, atha so'bhayaṃ gato bhavati, yadā hyevaiṣa
etasminnudaramantaraṃ kurute, atha tasya bhayaṃ bhavati, tattveva
bhayaṃ viduṣo'manvānasya, tadapyeṣa śloko bhavati

In the initial state, the manifested universe appeared as if non-existent. From this state of seeming non-existence, the existent emerged. This emergence was a process of self-creation, hence the term "Self" is attributed to this self-existent *Brahman*. This *Brahman*, the source of all existence, is the essence of happiness and manifests solely for the purpose of joy or pleasure. Those who realize and partake in this essence attain bliss. The very act of breathing, both inhalation and exhalation, is underpinned by this blissful state. If bliss did not permeate the ether or the space (*akasha*) within the heart, life processes such as breathing would not be sustained. *Brahman* is the fundamental entity, the giver of supreme bliss. When the individual soul, *Atman*, unites with *Brahman*, which is invisible, incorporeal, indefinite, and unsupported, it achieves liberation from fear. However, if there is any sense of separation or distinction between the self and *Brahman*, fear arises. Brahman itself becomes a source of fear for those who perceive any difference or separation from it. **Taittiriya Upanishad 2.7.1–3**

ānando brahmeti vyajānāt, ānandādhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante,
ānandena jātāni jīvanti, ānandaṃ prayantyabhisaṃviśantīti, saiṣā bhārgavī
vāruṇī vidyā, parame vyomanpratiṣṭhitā,
sa ya evaṃ veda pratitiṣṭhati, annavān
annādo bhavati, mahānbhavati prajayā

paśubhir brahma varcasena, mahān kīrtyā

One understands that bliss, or perfect happiness, is the Absolute (*Brahman*), because all beings are created by this bliss. Everything lives by perfect bliss, and those who leave this world return to bliss. This was taught by Varuna and learned by Bhrigu. It is realized in that sublime, supreme space where the cave of the heart resides. Those who understand this become one with *Brahman*. They will enjoy abundant food, have numerous offspring and livestock, and delight in the gloriously righteous and joyous life of the *Brahmanas*, the knowers of the Absolute. They will be truly famous, respected, and great individuals. **Taittiriya Upanishad 3.6.1–2**

The nature of the Absolute's bliss and love manifests in the endless diversity of universes. Thus, it is inherent in, and forms the essence and defining characteristic of all finite beings. The sensations of pleasure, pain, and indifference are seen as the flawed reactions of an unrefined, imperfect self to its surroundings. This type of response, by our limited selves, is what we know as waking consciousness. While ethics is focused on human life's conditions, it is merely one phase in the evolutionary journey of humanity and must evolve into something more profound. In line with this, Bergson argues that ethics, when confined to closed morality, presents a limited perspective and fails to capture the universe's true essence. He advocates for a transition to open morality, which is characteristic of a mystical vision and capable of bringing true love to humanity. Open morality goes beyond the scope of conventional ethics; it addresses problems not through rational thought but through intuition.[162]

Pre-intellectual beings were inherently closer to nature as their consciousness was primarily driven by instinct, functioning unconsciously. With the evolution of reason, consciousness began to operate in a more direct manner, evolving directly from the experiences of individuals. This evolution had its pros and cons. Bergson notes, "the intelligent being was not living in the present alone; there can be no reflection without foreknowledge, no foreknowledge without apprehension, no apprehension without a momentary slackening of the attachment to life."[163] One significant advantage humans have over instinct-driven beings is that they are not solely dictated by the social organization of their species, but have the capacity for self-interest.

In terms of religion, Bergson distinguishes static or natural religion as fulfilling the gap left by a lack of attachment to life in thinking beings. It's important to clarify that Bergson's concept of 'attachment to life' does not refer to the will to live or fear of death, but rather an innate urge to reconnect with the flow of life inherent in all existence. The advent of reason and thought has disrupted our close relationship with nature and our inherent trust in life. However, by returning to the origin of this natural impulse, we can restore this connection. Reason alone is not the key

here, as its function lies elsewhere – it unveils possibilities rather than reality. Around the intellect, there is a glimmer of intuition, and through this human beings can feel that they are permeated by a being more powerful than themself, while maintaining their own individuality. "Its attachment to life would henceforth be its inseparability from this principle, joy in joy, love of that which is all love."[164] This leads to a selfless dedication to all humanity, loving it in the love of the one who is the source of love. This, indeed, is already dynamic religion.

Bergson believed that true mysticism, in its essence, is exceptional, as the mystic is fundamentally a being beyond the human. If mysticism were to spread more widely, the current stage of nature's evolution would not be characterized by the ordinary human being, but by the mystic. Mysticism represents a partial merging with the creative force manifested in life, which is of God and is God itself. Mystics transcend material limits and boundaries, thereby extending divine action. Ancient traditions suggest that a meditative, concentrated, hypnotic state can prepare an individual for such transcendence. "Such must have been, in one aspect at least, the significance of the practices which culminated in yoga. Here mysticism was no more than outlined; but a more marked mysticism, a purely spiritual concentration, could utilize the yoga in its material elements, and by that very operation spiritualize it. In fact, the yoga seems to have been, at different times, and in different places, a more popular form of mystic contemplation, or else a complete system which included this contemplation."[165]

For Bergson, full mysticism involves action, creation, love, and thus renunciation – abstaining from life and the will that shapes life, and anything that is only a fraction of this fullness, is considered merely a path to it. One must believe and trust in the act, for then it becomes powerful and capable of moving mountains. The mystical current is not confined to specific forms, practices, or prescriptions. Instead, the soul opens itself to universal love rather than closing in on itself or succumbing to frenzy. Vision and rapture are part of the mystical journey, but the saints surpass them to reach the place where the human will become identical with divine will.

The beings of pure wisdom transcend the ordinary order and laws of life. They do not live for themselves or see themselves as the centre of being. They exist not merely for the sake of the species, but are deeply stirred and carried forward by an indefinable presence. "Then comes a boundless joy, an all-absorbing ecstasy or an enthralling rapture: God is there, and the soul is in God. Mystery is no more. Problems vanish, darkness is dispelled; everything is flooded with light."[166] Problems represent the gap between God and humans. When they fall away, thought and object become one: "Gone the radical separation between him who loves and him who is beloved: God is there, and joy is boundless."[167] Thought and emotion submerge into the source, leading to the need for the renewal of the will, so that life can ascend to a divine state. At moments of overwhelming emotion, when ecstasy subsides, the soul is left in solitude. This moment of solitude marks the commencement of

the final transformation, often referred to as "the dark night of the soul". In this process, the soul must evolve into an instrument of God, shedding all impediments and gaining resilience and resistance. While contemplation unites them, it is through action that the soul reverts to its individuality, momentarily distancing itself from God. Therefore, the soul's transformation into an instrument is essential; through this transformation, God acts within it, and a state of perpetual unity is achieved. Such a soul enjoys a freedom that resonates with divine activity: its capabilities are enhanced, it possesses comprehensive knowledge, makes sound decisions, and remains persevering and active.

The deep love experienced by mystics transcends mere human affection for God; it reflects God's own love for humanity. Each human being partakes equally in the essence of life and the divine. This profound love originates not from mere ideas, instincts, reason, or senses but from their very root. It mirrors God's sentiment towards the creation of all things and aligns with the direction of the vital impulse. Love itself is the impulse that the sage seeks to extend to all humanity. The goal is to dedicate oneself to humanity, to raise it to a divine level, moving beyond the lower plane of mere survival and the fear of death.[168]

ātmaprayatnasāpekṣā viśiṣṭā yā manogatiḥ
tasyā brahmaṇi saṃyogo yoga ity abhidhīyate
evam atyantavaiśiṣṭyayuktadharmopalakṣaṇaḥ
yasya yogaḥ sa vai yogī mumukṣur abhidhīyate
yogayuk prathamaṃ yogī yuñjamāno 'bhidhīyate
viniṣpannasamādhis tu parabrahmopalabdhimān
yady antarāyadoṣeṇa dūṣyate cāsya mānasam
janmāntarair abhyasato muktiḥ pūrvasya jāyate
viniṣpannasamādhis tu muktiṃ tatraiva janmani
prāpnoti yogī yogāgnidagdhakarmacayo 'cirāt
brahmacaryam ahiṃsāṃ ca satyāsteyāparigrahān
seveta yogī niṣkāmo yogyatāṃ svamano nayan
svādhyāyaśaucasaṃtoṣatapāṃsi niyatātmavān
kurvīta brahmaṇi tathā parasmin pravaṇaṃ manaḥ

Contemplative devotion, as a path to merging with *Brahman*, is a path of deep self-mastery and spiritual discipline. This practice is not merely an exercise in concentration but a transformative process that aligns the individual with the ultimate reality. As aspirants embark on this path, they are initially known as beginners or practitioners (*yoga yuj*), diligently cultivating their skills in meditation

and self-control. With unwavering commitment, these yogis evolve in their spiritual practice, eventually reaching a state of advanced realization, symbolized by *samadhi*, where meditation culminates in spiritual union. In this elevated state, the distinction between the meditator and the object of meditation dissolves, marking the achievement of ultimate liberation. The path to such profound realization is marked by consistency and perseverance. Even if the beginner yogi encounters imperfections or obstacles, these are gradually overcome through sustained practice across lifetimes, ultimately leading to liberation. For those who achieve spiritual perfection within their current lifetime, liberation becomes an immediate reality, as their actions are purified and transcended through the transformative power of yoga. Integral to this spiritual path are the observances of ethical and moral disciplines. These include non-harm (*ahimsa*), purity (*saucha*), refraining from theft (*asteya*), detachment from possessions and desires (*aparigraha*), and steadfast focus on the Supreme *Brahman*. Additionally, the practice of holy studies, purification rituals, contentment, penance, and self-control fortify the mind and spirit, preparing the yogi for the profound realization and absorption into the infinite bliss of *Brahman*. **Vishnu Purana 6.7.31–37**

Our everyday consciousness is largely unconscious, as most of it remains unknown and invisible to us. Unknown forces and subconscious powers control our actions and thoughts from behind the scenes. All of creation, emerging from this unconscious realm, is not individual or separate (as we often perceive it), but rather universal, surrounding and influencing us. We interpret this influence as our own, because when it prompts us to act, it seems to arise from within ourselves. The purpose of life, then, is to move from semi-consciousness to full consciousness. Consciousness can remedy everything; thus, it is essential to become increasingly conscious to transcend the darker aspects of nature. The real self has the power to enable this transformation and separation – distinguishing the lower nature from the higher, the outer from the inner. Part of this process involves observing the play of forces without taking them personally, recognizing that they do not belong to us and do not originate from us. True self-control or purification occurs when the aspirant's life is not dominated by the lower nature. This is most evident when the daily world of feelings and thoughts is not governed by unknown or semi-known urges, aversions, desires, and hatreds, which also involuntarily manifest in conflicts. The higher part then guides these natural urges and forces into the right channels, resulting in optimal functioning and achieving the greatest and best possible effects.

Self-fulfilment can be understood as the psychological need of a human being's higher nature to understand and govern the lower nature. This higher aspect seeks liberation from its constituent elements to prevent them from asserting dominance. When preferences, desires, and urges of the body, vital force, and mind are misaligned, they scatter focus and work in opposition to each other. Initially,

self-control is exercised through willpower, influenced by our identification or attachment to certain aspects of ourselves or our desires. However, attaining a higher level of mastery involves thoroughly comprehending and influencing these operations, thereby directing the whole system towards a unified goal.

The first step in this process is to detach the outward-focused senses from sensory objects. This detachment fosters experiential learning and creates a distance between the inner self and external influences, enhancing the understanding of one's previous identifications. The core of true mastery lies in non-attachment or separation (*vairagya*), which culminates in the dissolution of identity and distinguishes the true inner self from the external self. The power and will (*sankalpa*) of the self then emerge from within, replacing external disturbances with a state of calm detachment, purposefulness, and presence, embodying the inner being's freedom. Consequently, a state emerges characterized by the absence of conflicting reactions, movements, desires, and aspirations, signifying complete mastery over the outer being. Therefore, the progression towards self-mastery involves separation, liberation of the inner self, and ultimately mastery over the external nature.

In the light of our true self, we come to understand that our thoughts and feelings are not inherently our own, as they do not originate from our true self. The reality of this true self is distorted, diminished, and fragmented by the lower systems and their instruments, and it is impossible to restore it to its original state from these fragments. If consciousness is not constrained by identification with these lower means, it can perceive and understand everything perfectly, regardless of space and time. The practice of stepping back and adopting the role of a witness aids in achieving detachment and greater insight. We cannot simultaneously identify with both our inner and outer being. Thus, when the body, life-force, and mind are aligned with this identification, the vast light and awareness of the self recedes and cannot be truly ours. To achieve complete freedom, the separate sense of self must be transcended. The inherent nature of the self is immensely expansive, and as long as it experiences anything within a confined quality of space-time, it cannot be completely free.

When freed from the constraints of selfhood or personality, the self is liberated from the lower nature, but it is still influenced by the three qualities. Therefore, nature itself must be liberated, elevating these qualities to a divine level (goodness (*sattva*) into perfect light and knowledge, activity (*rajas*) into enthusiasm, inertia (*tamas*) into tranquillity). This represents the ultimate transformation of nature. The inner self is not just a witness, but also an approver who governs its nature, enabling the elimination of ignorance and errors in nature. Approval is always directed towards what is divine (such as peace, purity, tranquillity, etc.), while rejection pertains to what is non-divine. In this state, the free soul exists within a free nature, with the supreme self united with its supreme nature. However, this transformation is not solely the result of our own efforts;

practicing detachment or peace is insufficient. We must open ourselves to and accept Reality that can complete this transformation through its decent. Only then can the full power and capacity of the soul manifest.[169]

Ignorance can be depicted as the image of separative consciousness and the self-centred mind and life-force. This represents the moment when universal consciousness becomes severed from divine knowledge, from the light above the mind, abandoning truth. Due to this separation, a lower universal intelligence emerges, characterized not by truth, but by half-truths or half-falsities. Anything separated from the supreme light inevitably becomes limited, distorted, and narrowed. However, consciousness strives to regain its true self, to manifest the real self as the foundation of existence. When approaching matter from a transcendental perspective, unconsciousness can be understood in several layers:

- Belief in partial and temporary things as the entirety of truth arises from not knowing the Absolute, the source of all things.
- If we are not conscious of the unchanging, immovable self – the cosmic being beyond space and time – we perceive only its transformations as true.
- Forgetting our universal being, which is identical and united with all other beings, leads us to identify solely with our limited mind, life-force, and body.
- Unawareness of our infinite existence results in us claiming a finite time and space as our reality.
- If we are not aware of our complex, multidimensional being with its many layers of consciousness, we mistake the narrow, overly mental impressions of our surface being as real.
- Failing to perceive the trinity of body, life-force, and mind as instruments, we may identify with one or a combination of these, not recognizing the consciousness that underlies and uses them.
- Due to these, if we are unable to experience the true knowledge, control, and joy of our lives, if we are not conscious of our thoughts and feelings, if we are caught in dualities and chasing ever-changing goals, we remain in ignorance.

Understanding these dimensions of ignorance allows us to more clearly define the corresponding knowledge that can eradicate them. This involves becoming aware of the Absolute, the source of all things; the self and the universe that emerged from this self; the world that exists in unity with us,

not in isolation; the soul and its eternal, immortal existence; the larger and inner existence beyond our surface being; the components of our being and their relationships with others; the proper use of thought, will, and action; and how our nature expresses the truth of the self.[170]

2. To Know the Unknown

Unknown or unknowable: the limits of the mind – Tracing the manifested and knowable back to its source – The sole existent

"How then, in these conditions, could humanity turn heavenwards its attention, which is essentially concentrated on earth? If possible at all, it can only be by using simultaneously or successively two very different methods. The first would consist presumably in intensifying the intellectual work to such an extent, in carrying intelligence so far beyond what nature intended, that the simple tool would give place to a vast system of machinery such as might set human activity at liberty, this liberation being, moreover, stabilized by a political and social organization which would ensure the application of the mechanics to their true object."[171] This venture might be risky, but if both the mechanical and the mystical aspects are to develop, there will be times when one predominates, while the other reaps the benefits of a more robust and solid instrument, support, and foundation. Until the soul makes significant progress, mystics and their communities can preserve this balance, ensuring that when humanity reaches a crucial tipping point, everything can be rightly aligned. Some privileged souls already fully embody the higher order revealed within their own inner being. Religion, as a fixed version of this, allows everyone to share in it to some degree. Our intuition is often just a flicker, yet it can bring clarity, as Bergson suggested. We must delve into life's depths, and intuition is the only means to do so. By looking inward and grasping the continuity of our inner self, we can, through a higher affirmation, reach the source of being, as the mystics have done. One discovers that in becoming one with the divine, one doesn't just lose oneself but becomes more oneself than ever before – simple, unified, and powerful.

Since matter and life are interdependent and form the two complementary faces of creation, everything must assume its higher form, embodying a visible and tangible face of love and the need for love. The creative energy is love itself, seeking to emanate and create beings destined to love. Humanity has only partly realized its true nature and wouldn't know how to become whole if some representatives hadn't broken away from mechanical existence, moving towards God and away from materiality. Matter, though infinitely complex and intricate, originates from a source that is equally

simple and clear. This source is a world of unmarred joy, a realm of eternal peace and tranquillity, which every human being can experience and realize as a final state of mind. Through intuition, we can partake in this divine essence.[172]

Bergson, in his analysis of open and closed morality (and society) along with religion, delved into the concept of universal love. This form of love is not attached to any specific object or person but extends well beyond, nourishing all it encounters. It embodies impartiality and indivisibility, signifying absolute truth free from individual preferences. An open society, where individuals have access to everything they need for their development, self-expression, and self-fulfilment, paves the way for love and joy to become integral parts of the human journey. As one's emotional and spiritual life evolves, deep personal transformations are possible, fostering the happiness of creation and self-creation. Where there is joy, there is creation, and the richer the creation, the deeper the happiness. Universal love can expand human love and foster personal growth through joy. However, the moment this inclusive and embracing love becomes confined to certain members, it immediately turns partial, expectant, and stagnant, thus creating a bondage where personal progression is absent. The goal becomes the maintenance and preservation of a defined, closed group.[173]

Bergson noted that society has always been intertwined with religion, but religion can become distorted, irrational, or empty, losing its moral essence. He believed that society and the individual mutually define and condition each other, as society is a unity of individuals who are brought together, but it also shapes the individual. Religious beliefs and practices stem from the need to maintain and develop social and individual existence in line with our psychological structure. They aim to prevent the narrowing of the intellect and counteract the divisive effects of individual interest and self-centredness through religion's cohesive power. This is because individuals may not yet realize that their own interests are best served in a well-functioning social environment. Religion also offers a way out of the fear of death by guiding the soul forward. It can reconnect the individual to life, enabling inward reflection. However, static religion is only a precursor. Only mysticism, or dynamic religion, realizes its full potential, embodying the joy of joy, the love of love everywhere, reconnecting and coexisting with the creative force represented by life. The mystic transcends the material limitations of one’s species to manifest divine functioning. Attuned to creative evolution and life expressing its inherent consciousness through ongoing creation, the mystic reveals the source itself. Love reaches its fulfilment when manifested in action, creation, and the outpouring of love that human beings can experience.[174]

The concept of divine life beckons humanity to consciously evolve into the higher being that nature intended us to be. Humanity, long tempered by suffering, is poised on this path of moral development to manifest the divine within. To evolve means to grow in intuition, light, joy, love,

and self-control; to form a harmonious whole within oneself and extend compassion to humanity and all creatures. This growth ultimately leads to the realization of the world's unity, driving the essence of divine existence.

God created humans in its own image, but while the divine Reality is marked by qualities of being unlimited, spontaneous, absolute, harmonious, and self-sufficient, these attributes are mirrored in humans in a limited, relative, constrained, and often disharmonious form. Additionally, humans grapple with struggles, possessions, and find themselves lost in the transience and uncertainty these bring. Yet, within this constant state of imperfection, there exists a persistent desire and aspiration for perfection. Limited beings yearn for the infinite; the relative is drawn towards the absolute; and amidst disharmony, there is a steadfast pursuit of harmony.

We are in the midst of a great transition of nature, where we become aware of our purpose and aspire towards our divine ideal. However, God is multifaceted, encompassing knowledge, love, joy, power, and unity. Thus, it is not prudent to shortcut the path to divine nature through the exclusivity of one principle. Instead, it is beneficial to harmonize all the vital qualities that contribute to our fulfilment. The secret lies in a complex, empathetic, and all-embracing unity. Total transcendence is achieved when knowledge calms love into serene ecstasy and energizes it with power; when power works for the world with joy and light; when knowledge acknowledges and transforms the heart's vague impulses, surrendering to a higher will; and when all these elements live in unity with the world, accepting and transforming all things. This is the divine method of divine existence.[175]

And how, then, does freedom operate within divine being, within ultimate reality? Fate and free will are two aspects of the same indivisible energy, seemingly divided and opposed by the mind. The mind tends to exclude one, believing that only one can prevail at a time – that we are either free or predestined. This is a fallacy, as it divides what is indivisible. Our free will is an integral part of the source and is shaped by its nature. Freedom exists where there is a true self. Fate often embodies that immense energy, the divine will and knowledge, working within us for its own purposes. The outcomes of our actions belong to both God and the world; our actions belong to both God and us. The will operating in us is the undivided All, only seemingly separate in body and personality. When our will is influenced by lower planes, it opposes the divine will. However, it is possible to align our will with our intuition, the aspirations of our heart, or some ideal or mental power, thus serving the higher planes. This is a real will because it acts, leaves an impact, evolves, and freely chooses what is right. When the ego transcends its current form, free will becomes the will of God; by becoming God's conscious instrument, we can experience a freedom beyond human conception.[176]

Therefore, our consciousness can delve deep into the subtler dimensions of life, which necessitates an inward focus. The pathway to this depth is through meditation, culminating in *samadhi*, or meditative union with the Absolute. This union brings about the highest level of knowledge and truth, characterized by a joyful state of consciousness – serene externally and peaceful internally. In this state, every breath becomes intertwined with the real self and its constant remembrance. It guides the aspiring individual to their own essential nature, unveiling the various planes of consciousness and the core consciousness. Each person is afforded the possibility and the method to discover their innermost being. Within the deeper levels of our inner nature, calm and stillness intensify, unveiling intuitive knowledge from which peace, bliss, and rapture emanate: this is the realization of the real self. Meditation serves not only as a means towards the real self but also as an exploration of the conscious and unconscious levels. It aims to balance and develop these levels, facilitating a transition from ordinary states of consciousness to higher realms.

The goal is to encapsulate the authentic qualities of the absolute Reality in meditation in such a manner that it leads to ultimate happiness. The *Brahman* is not merely characterized by bliss or happiness; it is inherently and perpetually content within itself. On the path of acquiring wisdom, we still experience multiplicity; on the path of meditation, we experience the one truth as lived and realized. Yogis focus their minds on the vision of perfect unity. With their minds steadfastly fixed on the self, they become united with it, immersed in its contemplative yoga, and perceive it through the limited self or mind. The enlightened individual sees oneself in all beings and all beings in oneself.[177]

ātmā cittaṁ | jñānaṁ bandhaḥ | ... mohāvaraṇāt siddhiḥ | mohajayādanantābhogāt sahajavidyā-jayaḥ | ... nartaka ātmā | raṅgo'ntarātmā | prekṣakāṇīndriyāṇi | dhīvaśāt-sattva-siddhiḥ | siddhaḥ svatantra-bhāvaḥ

The real self is pure consciousness, and at its core, it shares an apparent identity with *chitta* – the limited consciousness of the experiencer, composed of the triad of intellect, ego, and mind. However, the knowledge emanating from this limited consciousness is actually the root of attachment to the world. [...] This attachment is a result of ignorance, a supernatural power of misconception that overwhelms the real self, obscures the mind, and creates attachments, thereby obstructing liberation from the world (created by the limited mind). Exercising control over the mind, deep contemplation or meditation on the centres of vital force can unveil the inner reality and nature of the infinite expanse, the universe itself. [...] The individual who has realized their innermost spiritual nature can be likened to a dancer on the world's stage. This stage is created by

the real self (Shiva) residing within. The senses act as spectators to the events unfolding on this stage. Through the perfect mastery of perception, one can guide the outer consciousness towards the central Reality within, thereby illuminating the light of the real self (*Atman*). Achieving this complete autonomy signifies a state of perfect liberation. **Shiva Sutras 3.1–2 & 3.6–7 & 3.9–13**

jñānājñāna padārthau dvāvātmano muktibandhadau
jñānān muktirnibandho'nyāt iti vedānta ḍiṇḍimaḥ ...
jīvo brahmātmanā jñeyo jñeyaṁ jīvātmanā param
muktistadaikya vijñānād iti vedānta diṇḍimaḥ
sarvātmatvāt param brahma śroturātmatayā sthitam
nāyāsastattvavijñaptau iti vedānta diṇḍimaḥ

Vedanta philosophy delineates two fundamental concepts: knowledge and ignorance. Knowledge leads to the liberation of the self from bondage, whereas ignorance results in continued bondage. In essence, knowledge equates to liberation, and ignorance equates to bondage. This is a central teaching of *Vedanta*. [...] It is crucial to recognize that the soul is fundamentally *Brahman*. The *jiva-atman*, or the individualized, embodied soul, must be acknowledged within each being. True liberation is found in realizing and experiencing the unity between these entities. This recognition of oneness is what *Vedanta* advocates. The Supreme Absolute is the real self of all that exists, making it the essential nature of both the seeker and the knower. Therefore, understanding the truth of the real self should not be inherently difficult, as it is intrinsic to our very being. This understanding and realization of the real self is what *Vedanta* continuously teaches. **Vedanta Dindimah 3 & 16–17**

Truth does not depend on the intellect, but rather the connection, and relies on the mind's state of peace and openness to receive the truth. In a quiet, unified mind, truth is discerned through direct identity. This direct contact enables one to distinguish truth from falsehood, a crucial step in the transformation of consciousness. To access this truth, several complementary movements are necessary:

- The consciousness that is currently external must be redirected inwards.
- The consciousness that is narrowly focused on the body must expand beyond its limits.
- The willpower and ambition that are confined within the mind's boundaries must be elevated beyond mental constraints.

- Finally, the higher consciousness, discovered beyond the mind, should be brought down to the lower planes (mind, life-force, body) through surrender, allowing their transformation by this higher consciousness.

In this silent, thought-free, and still state, we become receptive to the light and universal consciousness that is ever-present around us. As our identification with it deepens, truth flows to us from all directions. This is not merely a world of thoughts and ideas, a realm of the mind or intellect where beliefs, opinions, and conclusions reside, but rather an all-encompassing experience and certainty. The higher consciousness surpasses the mind, revealing itself not through thought but through experience, connection, and immersion. The mind alone cannot attain this; it must become an instrument of higher consciousness while also evolving into an intuitive intellect capable of direct contemplation of the truth. The sages and mystics have discovered this truth, which transcends the senses and the mind, bringing peace, joy, enlightenment, transformation of our lower functions, and dynamic inner growth. From this understanding arises freedom, inner harmony, and unity. This is the path to self-knowledge, world-knowledge, and God-knowledge.

Glossary

Absolute/God/Divine/Brahman/Ishwara: The supreme reality of the transcendent Being. It is self-existent which is absolved of all bondage to relativities. The Supreme Being from which all comes and in which all lives; it is the All and that which transcends the All. In its supreme Truth the Divine is absolute and infinite peace, consciousness, existence, power and delight. The Transcendent, the Cosmic (Universal) and the Individual are three powers of the Divine, overarching, underlying and penetrating the whole of manifestation. The Absolute is identical to the Spirit or Self, spaceless and timeless, the Self manifest in the Cosmos and Lord of Nature.

Adhibhuta: The elemental; the objective phenomenon of being.

Adhidaiva: That which pertains to the gods or non-material, psychological powers; the subjective phenomenon of being.

Adhyatma: The spiritual, everything that has to do with the highest existence or Atman in us; the principle of the self in Nature.

Akasha: Ether; the static principle of extension which is the eternal matrix of things.

Ananda: Bliss, delight, beatitude, spiritual ecstasy; a self-delight which is the very nature of the transcendent and infinite existence.

Antah-karana: The inner instrument; complex mind, or mind and vital as opposed to the body.

Aspiration: The call of the being for higher things, for all that belongs to the higher or divine consciousness.

Bhagavad Gita: *The Song of the Blessed Lord*, a celebrated scripture in the form of a dialogue between Krishna (Bhagavan or God) and Arjuna spoken on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, which occurs as an episode in the Mahabharata.

Brahmana: A member of the first of the four orders of society; the priest of knowledge; the man of learning and thought; the Divine as knowledge in man.

Buddhi: Intelligence-will or the discriminating principle, understanding, intellect, reason, thinking mind.

Chakra: Wheel, circle, disc, subtle centre, ganglionic centre in the nervous system.

Chitta: Basic consciousness, mind-stuff, the general stuff of mental consciousness, passive memory, "heart and mind".

Concentration/Dharana: It means gathering of the consciousness into one centre and fixing it in one object, idea, or condition.

Consciousness/Chit: The self-aware force of existence. The essence of consciousness is the power to be aware of itself and its objects, moreover it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy. Consciousness is not synonymous with mentality, because below mentality it sinks into vital and material movements which are for us subconscient; and above mentality it rises into the supramental which is for us the superconscient.

Consciousness-Force/Chit-Shakti: The conscious force or divine energy that builds the worlds, a universal energy that is the power of the Cosmic Spirit working out the cosmic and individual truth of things.

Creative evolution: It is flowing continuity, a constant change and creation, a striving without a definite goal, a force and intention that runs through life, not to achieve a predetermined goal, but rather a striving that provides a link to a future outcome. It is life itself, actually real movement, mutual interpenetration, and fusion. A true process leading to re-unification in the light of the above. In which every movement bears the stamp of its spiritual origin, its steps revealing its own spiritual source. It is not merely a movement that generates itself, but a process guided by the real self that actively determines creation, not merely witnesses it. It is incomprehensible to the intellect alone, since it is not justified by intellectual reasoning but by experience.

Duty/Dharma: Which one lays hold of and which holds things together; law of being, standard of Truth, rule of action; the religious, social and moral rule and conduct.

Duration/Dureé: It is the time of consciousness, the indivisibility of being without beginning and end, the flow of consciousness. A kind of lived, experienced and psychological time, the time of the real self, which is totally distinct from the time of reason (measured, divided, calculated). It is the basis of our existence, the substance and the essence of things, a continuity or thread that connects everything to all the other elements of the universe. It is an invention, a creation of forms, a constant elaboration of something new.

Ego/Limited self/Ahankara: The separative sense of individuality which makes each being conceive of itself as an independent personality. Ego implies the identification of one's existence with the outer mental, vital and physical self. It is the means of living in the world:

if experience does not touch us, we perceive nothing and do nothing; or we perceive everything and therefore do nothing. Personality limits the view, but enable us to act.

Embodied soul/Jiva-atman: The individual self, central being; the atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being; the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualized self of the created being. This central being is the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. It is the soul or psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life, then by the higher self-knowledge we can realize it as our true being, above these means (mind, body, life).

Enlightenment/Liberation/Realization/Moksha/Mukti: The sense of release as if from jail which accompanies the emergence of the psychic being or the realization of the self above. It is a release into peace, happiness, the soul's freedom. The reception in the consciousness and the establishment there of the fundamental truths of the Divine; the making real to ourselves and in ourselves of the Self, the transcendent and universal Divine.

Evolution: The progressive unfolding of the real self out of the density of material consciousness; a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from mind into the real self.

Ignorance/Avidya: The separative consciousness and the egoistic mind and life; the consciousness of the divided Many divorced from the unifying knowledge of the One Reality. When we are not aware of the oneness.

Inconscience: The self-involved, self-oblivious consciousness and force which is at the basis of the material world. This state is the apparent opposite of the Supreme and in it there can be darkness, inertia, insensibility, disharmony and disintegration. It is a complete sub-conscience, a supposed or involved consciousness.

Inner/outer being: The inner mind, inner vital, inner physical, with the psychic behind as the inmost. The surface being, our ordinary exterior mind, life, body consciousness.

Intuition: Inner, spontaneous, self-existent knowledge that characterizes life impulse and consciousness. The means of direct cognition or the acquisition of knowledge, above reason. A mental sympathy or conscious identification by which one is entered into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it. It allows us to feel ourselves one with the object we are contemplating, and thus to know its actual, essential reality.

Involution: The real self is present in the universe, and if the operation and appearance of its power follows the stages of evolution, then there must necessarily have been an earlier involution, for the secret of nature's actions is a hidden spiritual being. All that is involved in evolution has existed before in involution passively or by other kinds of activity, but has been hidden from us by nature. The real self, manifesting itself in the body, must have been in matter from the beginning, in all formations and particles. Life, mind, and whatever is above the mind, must be present as a latent, inert, or hidden force in all operations of energy.

Karma/Cause and effect: Action, work, the function of a human being. The power which by its continuity and development as a subjective and objective force determines the nature and eventuality of the soul's repeated existences.

Knowledge/Wisdom/Jnana/Vijnana: Supreme self-knowledge, self-aware and all-aware Intelligence; the essential and comprehensive aspect of the true unifying knowledge, the direct spiritual awareness of the supreme Being. It is the ideal mind, the free spiritual or divine intelligence, Truth, gnosis or supermind; the large embracing consciousness, especially characteristic of the supramental energy, which takes into itself all truth and idea and object of knowledge and sees them all at once in their essence, totality and parts or aspects.

Life-force/Life-impulse/Élan vital/Shakti: The life-energy is not material energy, but rather a different principle supporting matter and involved in it. It supports and occupies all forms and without it no physical form could have come into being or could remain in being. The divine force, the one energy that alone exists and alone makes universal or individual action possible, for this force is the Divine itself in the body of its power; in the individual it is a force for illumination, transformation, purification, for all that has to be done in the yoga. The vital energy or vital plane is the life-nature made up of desires, sensations, feelings, passions, energies of action, will of desire, reactions of the desire-soul of the human being and of all that play of possessive and other related instincts, anger, greed, lust, etc., that belong to this field of nature. It is a true instrument only when its feelings and tendencies have been purified by the psychic touch and governed by the spiritual light and power.

Mahat: Vast cosmic principle of force, the idea-being of the real self; the essential and original matrix of consciousness (involved not evolved) in *Prakriti* out of which individuality and formation come.

Mind/Mental plane/Manas: The mind proper or sense-mind. It is distinct from the intellect or buddhi. A world of mental existence in which mind is the first determinant (not matter or life), so mind is not determined by material conditions or by the life-force, but itself determines and uses them for its own goals.

Matter: Conscious Being manifested as substance; a self-formed mask and robe of the divine Self, matter is not fundamentally real, but a form of the force of Conscious Being. Considering the human being it is the physical consciousness and body.

Maya: Signified originally in the *Veda* the comprehensive and creative knowledge, wisdom that is from of old. The energy, force of the Absolute which creates the world and all creatures according to the intention of the Absolute.

Meditation/Contemplation/Dhyana: Mental concentration whether in thought, vision or knowledge.

Mystics: They have experienced the inherent outpouring of the life-force, they have found the ultimate source, the creative love of God. The system of the mystics usually based on a complex experience, and a set of faculties that are required to live over the mind, without the limitations of the body-life-mind complex. They are the initiated who understood the inner psychological meaning of the scriptures, disciplines, and methods.

Nature/Prakriti: The outer or executive side of the Conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds. The higher, divine nature (*Para Prakriti*) is free from ignorance and its consequences; the lower nature (*Prakriti*) is a mechanism of active force put forth for the working of the evolutionary ignorance. The lower nature of an individual is his mind, life and body.

Om: The mantra or expressive sound symbol of the *Brahman* in its four domains from the *turiya* to the external or material plane (i.e. the outward looking, the inward or subtle, and the superconscient causal – each letter A, U, M indicating one of these three in ascending order and the whole bringing out the fourth state, *turiya*). Used as an initiating syllable pronounced as a benedictory prelude and sanction.

Perfection/Siddhi: A growth out of a lower undivine into a higher divine nature.

Planes of existence/Principles of existence: It is an inner and outer effort by which the aspirant discovers and conquers unattainable planes of thought and experience. The progress in the mortal is made possible by the divine light, power and love that is omnipresent and ever-present. The unmanifested or supramental planes of existence are

hidden in mystery, covered by certain partitions, so that they are inaccessible to our vision and knowledge. Higher planes exist at all times, the aspirant can gradually reach them to become its own reality. The Vedic tradition speaks of the seven principles of being, which are the essence of the different planes: matter, life-force, mind, truth, pure beatitude or happiness, consciousness and existence. Of these, the first three are human principles and the next four are divine principles. It is in relation to these two groups that the dual consciousness of soul and nature (*Purusha-Prakriti*) can be understood. One of the purposes of yoga to provide a gateway to the divine existence where the human being can partake of eternal bliss instead of the temporary joy of the world.

Prajna: The Self situated in deep sleep (*sushupti*), the lord and creator of things, the master of wisdom and knowledge.

Purana: A class of sacred writings written in an easy form of Sanskrit (more modern than that of the Veda and Vedanta) composed of legends, apologues, etc.

Real Person/Purusha: Conscious Being or Soul. Essential being supporting the play of *Prakriti*. A Consciousness or a Conscient behind, that is the lord, witness, knower, enjoyer, upholder and source of sanction for nature's works.

Real Self/Soul/Atman: The universal spirit, the self-existent being, the conscious essential existence, one in all. The Self is being, not a being, it is the original and essential nature of our existence. The psychic essence or entity, the divine essence in the individual; a spark of the Divine that comes down into the manifestation to support the evolution of the individual. In the course of the evolution, the soul grows and evolves in the form of a soul-personality, the psychic being.

Reality/Truth/Satyam: A truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations. Behind the appearance of the universe is the Reality of an infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, an infinite delight of being.

Reincarnation/Punar janma: "Again-birth", rebirth. It is the means of the process of subjective, conscious development of the human being, that can delivered only across lifetimes. In the flow of subjective evolution the birth of the soul is a logical necessity. It is managed by subtle physical part of the human being which contains all the imprints of experiences and forms a new body for further development.

Samadhi: Yogic trance in which the mind acquires the capacity of withdrawing from its limited waking activities into freer and higher states of consciousness. Calm, desireless, griefless fixity of the intellect in self-poise and self-knowledge. Meditative union with the Absolute.

Samyama meditation: Self-control, rejection or self-dissociation. Concentration, directing or dwelling of the consciousness by which one becomes aware of all that is in an object. It is the combined exercise of concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*), and union with the absolute (*samadhi*).

Sankalpa: Resolution, power and will of the real self, that can help reaching a calm detachment, purposefulness and presence. Practice of the will enable yogic results, perfection and fulfilment.

Sankhya: The analysis, the enumeration and discriminative setting forth of the principles of our being. The abstract and analytical realization of truth. One of the six Indian disciplines (*darshana*). Elaborate the essence of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* and their relationship.

Sat: being, existence, pure Existence; the thing that truly is; the right, the highest, the best or real good.

Sheath/ Kosha: The oldest Vedantic knowledge tells us of five degrees of our being, the material, the vital, the mental, the ideal, the spiritual or beatific and to each of these grades of our soul there corresponds a grade of our substance.

Spiritualized mind/Gradations of the spiritualized mind: Higher ranges of Mind overtopping our normal mind and leading to Supermind; these successive states, levels or graded powers of being are hidden in our own superconscious parts. In ascending order the gradations are: **Higher Mind**, a luminous thought-mind whose instrumentation is through an elevated thought-power and comprehensive mental sight. In it one becomes constantly and closely aware of the Self, the One everywhere and knows and sees habitually with that awareness. **Illumined Mind**, a mind no longer of higher thought, but of spiritual light; here the clarity of the intelligence, its tranquil daylight, gives place or subordinates itself to an intense lustre, a splendour and illumination of the Self. **Intuition**, a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity. It gets the Truth in flashes and turns these into intuitive ideas. It is an edge or ray or outleap of a superior light. It is direct intimate vision. **Overmind**, full of lights and powers, it sees calmly, steadily, in great masses and large extensions of space and time and relation, globally, it creates and acts in the same way. It is a delegate of the Supramental Consciousness to the cosmic Ignorance. The Supramental is the total Truth-

Consciousness, from where the overmind draws down the truths separately and gives them a separate identity.

Sthula/Sukshma sharira: The gross body that is prana and physicality together. The subtle body is a subtler material existence behind our outer body which provides the substance not only of our physical but of our vital and mental sheaths.

Subconscient: The subconscient or subconscious of the individual is that submerged part of its being in which there is no waking conscious and coherent thought, will, feeling or organised reaction, but which yet receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up. From it too all sorts of stimuli, of persistent habitual movements can surge up into dream or into the waking state. In the ordinary human being the subconscient includes the larger part of the vital being and the physical mind and the secret body-consciousness.

Supramental/Supermind: The truth-consciousness, the divine gnosis, the highest divine consciousness and force operative in the universe. A principle of consciousness superior to mentality, it exists, acts and proceeds in the fundamental truth and unity of things and not like the mind in their appearances and phenomenal divisions. Its fundamental character is knowledge by identity, by which the Self or the divine *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is known, but also the truth of manifestation is known because this too is that.

Sushupti: Deep sleep or sleep-state, a consciousness corresponding to the supramental plane proper to the gnosis, which is beyond our experience because our causal body or envelope of gnosis is not developed in us, its faculties not active, and therefore we are in relation to that plane in a state of dreamless sleep. The Self that supports this state is *prajna*.

Taijasa: The luminous, the Self that supports the dream-state (*svapna*) or subtle consciousness.

Tantra: A yogic system which is in its nature synthetical and starts from a great central principle and dynamic force of nature. In the Vedic methods of yoga the lord of the yoga is the *Purusha*, the Conscious Soul, but in *tantra* it is rather *Prakriti*, the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe. It was by learning and applying the secrets and methods of this Will-in-Power that the yogi pursued the aims of its discipline-mastery, perfection, liberation, beatitude. The method is to raise Nature in the human being into manifest power of the real self.

Tat twam asi: You are That, meaning that all creature is identical with the source of it, the Absolute or God. It is a well-known *maha vakya* or great word, that is coming from the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (6.8.7).

Upanishad: Inner knowledge, the secret teaching which enters into the final truth and settles in it. One of a class of Indian sacred writings, regarded as the source of the *Vedanta*-philosophy. It gives an insight into the *Veda*, as the sage meditated on verses of the *Veda*, then passed on the results of this meditation to its disciples.

Vairagya: Complete cessation of desire and attachment, a kind of distaste to the ordinary things. It points to the wisdom that if we don't hold on to something, we really do own everything – only then the real essence behind a thing can be revealed.

Vaishvanara: The universal Person, the waking-self, the self that supports the waking state (*jagrat*), or the external consciousness.

Veda: Knowledge, knowledge of the Divine, the book of knowledge. It contains the highest spiritual truth that the mind can understand. It has given rise to many religious movements and metaphysical philosophies, and is the origin and foundation of all that is true. Even if it is a collection of sacrificial hymns embedded in an ancient language, its inner meaning is psychological, universal, understood only by the initiated, while its apparent meaning conveys a natural religion to the people. Once the symbols are interpreted in terms of their hidden meaning, a coherent set of spiritual, psychological and religious ideas emerges.

Vedanta: The end or culmination of the *Veda*, basically the *Upanishads* (which occur at the end of the *Veda*). A system of philosophy based on the *Upanishads* teaching the culminating knowledge of the Absolute, considered to be one of the six Indian disciplines (*darshana*).

Yoga: Joining, union; the union of the soul with the immortal being and consciousness and delight of the Divine. A methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence. The concrete and synthetical realization of truth in our experience. A system of philosophy systematised by Patanjali, one of the six Indian disciplines (*darshana*).

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